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This thesis is a study of the practice of *flânerie* (“strolling”) in three novels by the nineteenth-century French author and purveyor of Naturalism, Émile Zola: Thérèse Raquin, La Curée, and Au Bonheur des dames. *Flânerie*, the dual activity of walking and observing, constitutes a spatial and visual negotiation of the urban landscape. As defined by Charles Baudelaire and redefined by the twentieth-century German Marxist critic, Walter Benjamin, the *flâneur* is a leisurely male stroller with an ambiguous role in the changing metropolis. The possibility of a female *flâneuse* raises fundamental questions about the role of women in urban public life. In the course of this thesis, I expose the presence and nature of a Zolian *flâneuse* by examining the cases of his female characters in the three novels and their relation to existing social limitations and new possibilities for emancipation in late nineteenth-century Paris. In the end, I propose that the successful and failed *flânerie* of these characters highlights the paradoxes of women in the new spaces of modernity, areas devoted to leisure, consumerism, and spectatorship.

FLÂNERIE IN ZOLA'S PARIS

by

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To my parents and my husband John for their love, encouragement, and support.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Modern urban expansion and transformations in the nineteenth century gave rise to new modes of perception and movement. The figure of the *flâneur* has emerged in literature to represent the individual engaged in exploring the changing metropolis.¹ While recent criticism has located the flâneur in settings ranging from early twentieth century Berlin to contemporary New York, this figure has traditionally been situated in nineteenth-century Paris.² The French capital at that time is precisely the setting of several novels by the late nineteenth-century novelist and purveyor of Naturalism, Émile Zola. It is the “moment” and “milieu” to borrow the terms Hippolyte Taine, the nineteenth-century French critic and historian whose work formed the theoretical basis for the naturalist literary movement (17). The question thus arises as to whether the flâneur in fact makes an appearance in the works of Zola. Even more compelling, however, is the prospect that Zola’s heroines act at times as female flâneurs, or *flâneuses*.

The flâneur first became known to the public through *feuilletons* and books in the early to mid 1800s. Here, he evolved from a disesteemed idler, a shiftless antithesis to the bourgeois work ethic, to a curious explorer of the city, an admirer of art, and an observer of capitalist consumption.³ The poet Charles Baudelaire was the first writer to connect the flâneur explicitly to modernity⁴ in “Le Peintre de la vie moderne,” published in 1863. The artist at the center of this essay, little-known illustrator Constantin Guys,

captures in his rapid sketches of city life what Baudelaire considers to be the ephemeral and fundamentally urban aesthetic of modernity. Cosmopolitan, inquisitive, and peripatetic, Guys both embodies the flâneur and provides a point of departure for Baudelaire's vision of the intoxicating experience of the metropolis.

The German literary critic Walter Benjamin turned his attention to the flâneur in a series of essays on Baudelaire and Paris written in the 1930s but unpublished during his lifetime. Benjamin's flâneur is a product of nineteenth-century Paris who makes his home in the public and semi-public spaces of the period, such as arcades, boulevards, and department stores. For Benjamin, the powerful illusory quality of the emerging capitalist culture turns these crowded public spaces into private fantasy realms ("phantasmagoria") for the flâneur.⁵

Central to the definition of the flâneur are the acts of strolling and looking. Traditionally, the flâneur is a man of leisure who enjoys ambling around the city, an activity made possible by his male privilege of freedom of mobility. The possibility of a female version of this character, the flâneuse, has also been considered, although she remains the subject of scholarly debate. Critics such as Janet Wolff and Griselda Pollock have rejected this concept, insisting that the flâneuse is absent from the literature and art of modernity because the nineteenth-century, gendered division of public and private spheres prevented women from wandering the streets of Paris without risking their safety and respectability. Furthermore, women are often represented as the object of the flâneur's gaze, rather than as the agent of the gaze. In response, Elizabeth Wilson has argued that the presumption of a gendered public/private sphere division is just as

problematic, and, along with Susan Buck-Morss, she posits the possibility of regarding the prostitute as a sort of flâneuse, since she walks in public and knows the city intimately. Anne Friedberg, on the other hand, has suggested that the flâneuse first emerged in the nineteenth-century department store, a public space specifically designed for the strolling, gazing female shopper. Following upon the assertions of Wilson, Buck-Morss, and Friedberg, then, the flâneuse that goes unmentioned in nineteenth-century literature can nonetheless be found between the lines.

With this critical background in mind, I propose, in the present thesis, to turn to three novels by Émile Zola: an early work, Thérèse Raquin (1867), and two from his twenty-book series “Les Rougon-Macquart,” La Curée (1872) and Au Bonheur des dames (1883). All three works are rich in details about new spaces of nineteenth-century Paris, areas devoted to leisure, consumerism, and spectatorship. Further, I shall focus primarily on Zola’s female characters as women who occupy an indeterminate realm, caught between tradition and progress, old Paris and new Paris, lingering social restrictions and new possibilities for emancipation. Admittedly, the limitations placed on the female characters often result in spatial (and emotional) immobilization, which contrasts with the freedom of male characters to engage in flânerie. Nevertheless, several of Zola’s women become at times solitary urban travelers who participate as much in ocular strolling as bodily movement. At such moments, these women project an image of the modern flâneuse.

Thérèse Raquin takes place in a Parisian arcade, the structure that Benjamin sees as conducive to safe and leisurely strolling and, thus, the ideal terrain of the flâneur in the

days before Haussmann's wide boulevards. The seclusion of the female characters in the novel seems to support the notion of the separation of spheres that makes public flânerie an essentially male activity. However, Zola subverts the public/private space dichotomy with respect to the domain of the women, and I shall argue that this calls into question one of the key differences that defines the flâneur. In addition, I will examine one particular scene of female flânerie that opens the possibility of a Zolian flâneuse, while at the same time illustrating the stigma attached to the independent, mobile woman of the nineteenth century.

In La Curée, the reader participates in witnessing Haussmann's transformations of Parisian streets that open up new avenues of flânerie. The main characters have different experiences while moving through Paris and observing the urban spectacle, and their engagement with the city is influenced by gender roles. With their focus on the changing urban landscape, the characters participate in what I shall propose as a sort of flânerie of the eye that raises intriguing questions about women's access to the authority inherent in the male gaze.

The female department store shoppers in Au Bonheur des dames have been interpreted as flâneuses who duplicate the flâneur's leisurely stroll and roaming eye (Friedberg 36). Yet critics have also suggested that consumerism is antithetical to the aimlessness of the flâneur's wanderings (Wolff 21; Ferguson 27). I shall examine scenes of flânerie in the novel in order to contribute to the debate and attempt to account for the version of the flâneuse that may be found in Zola's female characters.

The images of *flânerie* in these three novels offer a sense of the ambiguity of public and private realms during the latter decades of the nineteenth century, while also shedding light on the problematic participation of women in the urban scene. In the thesis that follows, I shall argue that the *flâneuse* designation cannot be applied unequivocally to any one character in these novels, but that instead, Zola's women step into and out of the *flâneuse* role. This fluctuation reflects the changing position of women during a period of urban and social renewal.

NOTES

¹ The French term *flâneur* is used rather than its closest English equivalent, “stroller,” in critical discourse on this figure. In keeping with this practice, I shall refer to the *flâneur*, the *flâneuse*, and their activity, *flânerie*, with these French terms.

² See Anke Gleber, The Art of Taking a Walk: Flânerie, Literature, and Film in Weimar Culture (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); and Helen Richards, “Sex and the City: A Visible Flâneuse for the Postmodern Era?” (Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies 17[2003]: 147-57).

³ Ferguson explores the connection between the flâneur and art presented in two particular works: an anonymous 1806 pamphlet entitled “Le Flâneur au salon ou M. Bon-Homme: examen joyeux des tableaux, mêlé de vaudevilles”; and Balzac’s 1826 novel, Physiologie du mariage (Ferguson 26-28). In the same manner, Mazlish notes the immense popularity of the 1841 book Physiologie du flâneur by Louis Huart (47).

⁴ The concept of “modernity” is complex and elusive, and Marshall Berman has shown that its meaning for Baudelaire is multifaceted and even contradictory (131-71). For the sake of this thesis, the term “modernity” shall be generally used to refer to the contemporary, urban experience that Baudelaire describes as “le transitoire, le fugitif, le contingent” (Oeuvres 695). This notion is admittedly problematic and not necessarily unique to the nineteenth-century experience, except insofar as this sense of contingency

is typically linked to city life affected by the Industrial Revolution and the increased pace witnessed after the fall of the *Ancien Régime*.

⁵ Benjamin writes in “Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century”: “The crowd is the veil through which the familiar city beckons to the flâneur as phantasmagoria – now a landscape, now a room. Both become elements of the department store, which makes use of flânerie itself to sell goods” (Writer, 40).

CHAPTER II

THÉRÈSE RAQUIN: DEATH IN/OF THE ARCADE

The nineteenth-century Parisian arcade was a successor of the Palais Royal, which Johann Geist identifies as “the first public urban space removed from the disturbances of traffic” (60). The Galeries de Bois, built in the gardens of the Palais Royal between 1786-1788, were the prototype of the arcade, and the wooden structure became the model for the nineteenth century *passage couvert*, a sheltered corridor lit from above with shops lining the interior sides (Delorme and Dubois 72; Geist 457).¹ Construction of such arcades in Paris was at its peak between 1820-1840, but the fashion was soon in decline, beginning in the 1860s, when shopping moved into the *grands magasins*, and Baron Haussmann’s new boulevards improved the safety and flow of the streets. It is precisely during this period of decline that Émile Zola sets his 1867 novel Thérèse Raquin. In his essay “Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century,” Walter Benjamin observes that Zola “bids farewell to the arcades in his Thérèse Raquin” (Writer, 33). The setting of the story in the Passage du Pont-Neuf at this particular moment in the history of the arcade is appropriate for a tale in which the main characters, like the fashion of the covered walkway, are essentially dying. The scenes in the *passage* – and the setting itself – evoke paralysis and death, and thus contrast with Benjamin’s image of the nineteenth-century arcade as a place for strolling and observing Parisian life, or, in other words, *flânerie*.

Yet when the characters in the novel venture beyond the *passage* into Paris at large, their excursions warrant comparisons to the practices of the flâneur.

The location of the actual Passage du Pont-Neuf on the Left Bank was unusual, for the arcades emerged principally on the fashionable Right Bank. Geist describes the environs of the Passage du Pont-Neuf: “There was no fashion industry and there were few fine shops in the area. The streets were old, narrow, and unsuitable for strolling” (486). Thus, had Zola set his novel during the heyday of the Parisian arcade, the desolation of his Passage du Pont-Neuf may still have been fitting, and this contributes to the sense that time stands still in this public space. Notwithstanding the authenticity of the setting, Zola’s depiction is an artful literary construction. In a letter to Zola, the literary critic Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve goes so far as to accuse the author of misrepresenting the arcade:

...je connais ce passage autant que personne et par toutes les raisons qu’un jeune homme a pu avoir d’y rôder. Eh bien! ce n’est pas vrai, c’est fantastique de description: c’est comme la rue Soli, de Balzac. Le passage est plat, banal, laid, surtout étroit, mais il n’a pas toute cette noirceur profonde et ces teintes à la Rembrandt que vous lui prêtez. (369)

Interestingly, Sainte-Beuve portrays himself, however inadvertently, as somewhat of a flâneur, a young man loitering in the arcade. But what is more important here is his familiarity with the arcade as a narrow and dreary place, one that the contemporary reader might also recognize. Zola seems to have chosen the Passage du Pont-Neuf because of the images it would evoke, images that he would not merely duplicate, but also sharpen and amplify.

In the novel, Madame Raquin, the aged aunt and guardian of the title character, rents a shop in the Passage du Pont-Neuf because of – not in spite of – the desolation of the area. When her sickly but mildly ambitious son Camille announces his plan to move to Paris, Mme Raquin gives up her peaceful retirement in provincial Vernon in order to join him, fearing that he will suffer without her constant care. A former haberdasher, Mme Raquin decides to open a shop in Paris where her niece Thérèse, whom she has just married to Camille (also Thérèse’s cousin), may gain sales experience. To this end, Mme Raquin travels alone to Paris to consider a shop for rent in the Passage du Pont-Neuf. Her initial impressions highlight the bleakness of the area:

L’ancienne mercière trouva la boutique un peu petite, un peu noire; mais, en traversant Paris, elle avait été effrayée par le tapage des rues, par le luxe des étalages, et cette galerie étroite, ces vitrines modestes lui rappelèrent son ancien magasin, si paisible. Elle put se croire encore en province, elle respira, elle pensa que ses chers enfants seraient heureux dans ce coin ignoré. (13)

Rather than choose a busy and potentially profitable location, Mme Raquin seeks to replicate the tranquility of her country shop in this “coin ignoré” on the Left Bank.

Like Mme Raquin, the flâneur depicted by Benjamin seeks refuge from the bustle of the Paris streets. Carriages, in particular, drive the flâneur into the arcade, as Benjamin indicates in his massive, unfinished Arcades Project: “Until 1870, the carriage ruled the streets. On the narrow sidewalks the pedestrian was extremely cramped, and so strolling took place principally in the arcades, which offered protection from bad weather and from the traffic” (32). Geist explains that the medieval street, still in existence in

nineteenth-century Paris, was congested, muddy, and generally hazardous, so the arcade rose as an alternative site for strolling and window shopping (62). The arcades thereby enabled and encouraged leisurely walking: “Flânerie could hardly have assumed the importance it did without the arcades,” (Benjamin, Writer, 68).

While the arcade was the terrain of the flâneur, it would seem that this leisurely stroller had abandoned the Passage du Pont-Neuf of Thérèse Raquin. In establishing the setting at the beginning of the novel, Zola states candidly: “Le passage du Pont-Neuf n’est pas un lieu de promenade. On le prend pour éviter un détour, pour gagner quelques minutes” (5). This use of the *passage* as a shortcut corresponds with Geist’s observation that “[i]ts name indicates its location and its function as a traffic artery” (486). The workers and other pedestrians that Zola describes dashing through the Passage du Pont-Neuf are diametrically opposed to the flâneur strolling at a turtle’s pace.² They move swiftly and purposefully through the *passage*, immune to consumer temptation: “chacun court à ses occupations, la tête basse, marchant rapidement, sans donner aux boutiques un seul coup d’œil. Les boutiquiers regardent d’un air inquiet les passants qui, par miracle, s’arrêtent devant leurs étalages” (6). By contrast, the flâneur is as much a spectator as a walker. According to Benjamin, he becomes intoxicated by “the sensory data taking shape before his eyes” in his role as “the observer of the marketplace” (Arcades 417, 427). In her study the flâneur figure in Benjamin’s Arcades Project, Susan Buck-Morss describes the act of visual consumption performed by the flâneur in the *passages couverts*: “he practiced his trade of not trading, viewing as he loitered the varied selection of luxury-goods and luxury-people displayed before him” (102). From the

beginning, the flâneur is associated with capitalist consumption, initially as a consumer of the sights that make up the urban spectacle unfolding within the commercial arcade.

With the rise of the department store, the flâneur will become a consumer of the merchandise itself as he transforms into the flâneuse-shopper, as we shall see in our study of Au Bonheur des dames in Chapter IV.

It is no wonder that the typical flâneur is nowhere to be found in the Passage du Pont-Neuf of Thérèse Raquin, where the shopkeepers offer no dazzling displays to capture his gaze. Instead, “les étalages gris de poussière dorment vaguement dans l’ombre” (5). The merchandise is indistinct and neglected, “des objets sans nom, des marchandises oubliées là depuis vingt ans...”(5). In Zola Before the Rougon-Macquart, John Lapp has commented that Zola focuses on items in the windows of the Raquin shop in order to “show how their vital colours have faded into a uniformly lifeless grey in the dampness and dust” (90). The goods that Mme Raquin has purchased from the previous shopkeepers are as useless and outmoded as the arcade itself, contributing to the sense of imminent extinction.

Zola “bids farewell to the arcades in Thérèse Raquin” by illustrating the demise of the Passage du Pont-Neuf. It is clear that the arcade is dying – most of its customers have gone elsewhere, and even the loitering flâneur would find nothing there to entice him. But the *passage* is not just a moribund commercial institution; it is also a place of death and decay for the characters that inhabit it. The setting of Thérèse Raquin evokes death owing to the very shape of the arcade. While the *passage couvert* was once an innovative structure that allowed the flâneur to take a comfortable stroll, the claustrophobic Passage

du Pont-Neuf now closes in like a coffin on its inhabitants. As Lilian Furst has observed in her analysis of the novel: “The whole Passage [du] Pont-Neuf, from its elongated, narrow shape to its darkness and decay, seems to hint at the grave” (195). We might add that its layout is also evocative of a cemetery, with shops/plots lining the walls: “des boutiques obscures, basses, écrasées, laissant échapper des souffles froids de caveau” (5).

Elsewhere in the novel, Zola’s descriptions of the setting reinforce the images of the graveyard. The *passage* is “une galerie souterraine vaguement éclairée par trois lampes funéraires” (6). Likewise, the shop is a “caveau sombre, puant le cimetière” (132). It is also compared to a “fosse” (14, 101) and “tombeau” (75). Even the image of the shop as a “trou noir” brings to mind a grave (75). Lapp has taken the *passage* a step beyond the graveyard, suggesting that “the arcade is a kind of netherworld, shutting out or denaturing life. By its very narrowness and darkness it represents the antithesis of all that is natural” (90).

Indeed, the dwellers in this graveyard or “netherworld” are dehumanized to the extent that they appear as ghastly spirits or members of the living dead. The shopkeepers are distorted, spectral shapes, stirring in their shops/graves: “les boutiques pleines de ténèbres sont autant de trous lugubres dans lesquels s’agitent des formes bizarres” (5) (my emphasis). The characters that surround Thérèse all seem otherworldly. The guests at Mme Raquin’s weekly dominoes games (the “soirées du jeudi”) are, in Thérèse’s eyes, “créatures grotesques et sinistres,” “cadavres mécaniques,” and “poupées de carton qui grimaçaient autour d’elle” (17-18). Thérèse’s only friend, Suzanne, is a “pauvre créature, toute morte et toute blanche,” “vivant à demi, mettant dans la boutique une fade senteur

de cimetière” (79, 101). In Zola’s own account of his naturalist project included in the preface to the second edition of the novel, the author evokes images of the living dead while comparing his study of the main characters to dissection: “J’ai simplement fait sur deux corps vivants le travail analytique que les chirurgiens font sur des cadavres” (2).

Mme Raquin resembles a “corps vivant” from the very beginning of the novel. Immobilized in the tomb-like Passage du Pont-Neuf even before paralysis freezes her body, she is the antithesis of the traveling flâneuse. Mme Raquin becomes a permanent fixture in the arcade from the moment she moves into the shop and flat above. In fact, we read about her leaving the *passage* only once, to attend the marriage of Thérèse and Laurent, who wed after a seemingly suitable period of mourning Camille’s death. And at this point, her mobility is compromised – she can no longer walk and must be lifted into the carriage. The elderly shopkeeper becomes increasingly immobilized over the course of the novel, moving from spatial confinement to complete physical paralysis. As paralysis stills her body and aphasia silences her voice, she becomes a “cadavre vivant à moitié” to Thérèse and Laurent (110). Her face is a “visage mort” and like “le masque dissous d’une morte, au milieu duquel on aurait mis deux yeux vivants” (113, 110). Furthermore, it is as though she is already in a grave, “comme un de ces vivants qu’on ensevelit par mégarde et qui se réveillent dans la nuit de la terre, à deux ou trois mètres au-dessous du sol” (112). Then, when Mme Raquin realizes that Thérèse and Laurent have murdered Camille, her feelings of helplessness and desperation are compared once more to the experience of premature burial: “Ses sensations ressemblaient à celles d’un homme tombé en léthargie qu’on enterrerait et qui, bâillonné par les liens de sa chair,

entendrait sur sa tête le bruit sourd des pelletées de sable” (114). If the Passage du Pont-Neuf is a sort of cemetery, and the shop is akin to a vault, then Mme Raquin’s own body has become her coffin, enclosed in that vault in spite of her lucid state of mind. Her spirit survives, “vivante encore et enterrée au fond d’une chair morte” (112).

Thérèse is also compared to the victim of premature burial. When she enters the shop for the first time, it seems to her that she “descendait dans la terre grasse d’une fosse” (5). During the Thursday evening soirées, “elle se croyait enfouie au fond d’un caveau, en compagnie de cadavres mécaniques...” (17). The sensation that she has been buried alive in the Passage du Pont-Neuf does not subside after Camille’s death:

Par moments, en voyant les lueurs terreuses qui traînaient autour d’elle, en sentant l’odeur âcre de l’humidité, elle s’imaginait qu’elle venait d’être enterrée vive; elle croyait se trouver dans la terre, au fond d’une fosse commune où grouillaient des morts. (101)

As Elizabeth Knutson has pointed out in her examination of the supernatural elements of Thérèse Raquin, the theme of premature burial in the novel represents “the repression of life energy” (144). Mme Raquin’s paralysis and aphasia – the burial of her intellect, spirit, and voice within her inert body – prevent her from screaming, attacking her son’s murderers, or, at the very least, exposing their crime.

Thérèse’s immobility may be a symptom of the repression of her youthful and sexual energies. As a child, Zola tells us, Thérèse was raised alongside the sickly Camille, sharing her cousin’s room, bed, and even medicine. Consequently, this “vie forcée de convalescente” caused her to become withdrawn, taciturn, habitually sitting still

and staring blankly (10). Yet in spite of the passivity that she displayed, one could sense from her robust and lithe body “toute une énergie, toute une passion qui dormaient dans sa chair assoupie” (10). Her languor appears to be intentional, cultivated, a reaction to her stifling situation. When she is with Camille, “toute sa volonté tendait à faire de son être un instrument passif, d’une complaisance et d’une abnégation suprêmes” (15).

A leitmotif in the novel is that of Thérèse, immobile and silent, seated at the counter of the Raquin boutique, suggesting none of the qualities of the flâneuse. Our first view of Thérèse is through the shop window in the Zola’s initial description of the Passage du Pont-Neuf. We see only her pale, ghost-like profile emerging hazily from the shadows, her body hidden in the darkness and her head seemingly suspended between two soiled bonnets. The profile “était là, pendant des heures, immobile et paisible” (7). Zola adds to the impression of timelessness and lack of progression by omitting any indication of the moment in the narrative when this scene occurs. Thérèse’s profile, motionless and framed by shadows, resembles a painted portrait and, as such, foreshadows Laurent’s portrait of Camille that will haunt the murderers later in the novel. Once the narrative begins, Thérèse’s fixed position in the shop is established: “Dès le premier jour, Thérèse s’était assise derrière le comptoir, et elle ne bougeait plus de cette place” (14). An image of Thérèse after the crime takes us back to her first appearance in the story: “Derrière les bonnets de linge pendus aux tringles rouillées, le visage de Thérèse avait une pâleur plus mate, plus terreuse, une immobilité d’un calme sinistre” (56). The narrative thereby comes full circle as it recreates the impression that Thérèse is frozen in both space and time in the *passage*.

If Thérèse remains in the Passage du Pont-Neuf in part because of her self-imposed passivity, she is also confined there because, quite simply, she cannot leave. Her aunt's plan for the move to Paris at the start of the novel underscores the limitations on the women's freedom. She tells her son: "nous nous remettrons, Thérèse et moi, à vendre du fil et des aiguilles. Cela nous occupera. Toi, Camille, tu feras ce que tu voudras; tu te promèneras au soleil ou tu trouveras un emploi" (12-13). While Camille may *flâner*, the Raquin women must remain in the shop and, moreover, work in order to make possible his *flânerie*. That Camille opts to find a job does not diminish his essential freedom of mobility.

Before her affair with Laurent, Thérèse has no established reason to leave the Passage du Pont-Neuf. She is uninterested in urban spectatorship, as demonstrated by her resistance to Sunday promenades with her husband along the Champs-Élysées:

Camille forçait Thérèse à sortir avec lui ... La jeune femme aurait préféré rester dans l'ombre humide de la boutique; elle se fatiguait, elle s'ennuyait au bras de son mari qui la traînait sur les trottoirs, en s'arrêtant aux boutiques, avec des étonnements, des réflexions, des silences d'imbécile.
(40)

This forced *flânerie* reveals Thérèse to be indifferent not only to the environment, but also to such gendered activities as window-shopping.

During the affair, Thérèse leaves the arcade only once by herself to visit Laurent, who can no longer slip away from work for their afternoon trysts. In that instance, her journey through Paris is antithetical to the leisurely stroll of the true *flâneur*. Having invented a pretext to leave home, Thérèse must rush the trip:

La jeune femme courut au Port aux Vins, glissant sur les pavés qui étaient gras, heurtant les passants, ayant hâte d'arriver. Des moiteurs lui montaient au visage; ses mains brûlaient. On aurait dit une femme soûle. Elle gravit rapidement l'escalier de l'hôtel meublé. Au sixième étage, essoufflée, les yeux vagues, elle aperçut Laurent, penché sur la rampe, qui l'attendait. (34)

The references to speed, sweat, and breathlessness underscore Thérèse's lack of freedom to move through Paris at her own pace, and, by extension, explore her surroundings through *flânerie*. Furthermore, Thérèse's excursion does not contain two of the key elements that Janet Wolff has determined to be fundamental to the *flâneur*'s activity: "the aimlessness of strolling, and the reflectiveness of the gaze" (Wolff's emphasis) (21). Thérèse has a clear purpose in mind as she scrambles to meet her lover. She does not have time to gaze. In fact, until she spots Laurent at the top of the stairs, the reader has no sense of her visual perspective. Quite the opposite, Zola endeavors here to present her in an "objective" manner, with the only exception being the reference to her burning hands. She appears to us a stranger spotted on the street, a nameless "jeune femme" running, bumping into pedestrians, seemingly drunk. Her return to the *passage* also demonstrates the absence of the *flâneur*'s reflective gaze: "La tête en feu, la pensée tendue, elle arriva au passage du Pont-Neuf, sans avoir conscience du chemin parcouru" (38). Thérèse may have ventured into the streets of Paris, but she has not cast a *flâneur*'s eye on the urban spectacle.

Thérèse and Mme Raquin's confinement to the Passage du Pont-Neuf would seem to reinforce their exclusion from the urban experience of the male *flâneur*. As women,

they are not free to wander alone through the streets of Paris. The streets are dangerous, as Mme Raquin reminds Camille and Thérèse, refusing to venture beyond the end of the *passage* to join them in their Sunday strolls along the Champs-Élysées: “Surtout, leur disait-elle, prenez garde aux accidents... Il y a tant de voitures dans ce Paris!” (40-41). If Mme Raquin is initially driven into the Passage du Pont-Neuf by the “tapage des rues,” this also serves to keep her from leaving the arcade.

Moreover, Mme Raquin and Thérèse are confined to the *passage* by prevailing social norms. According to Wolff, a woman wandering alone in the nineteenth-century city was branded as “non-respectable” and identified with the prostitute (19). Likewise, in her analysis of the *flâneuse* question, Elizabeth Wilson has explained that women in public “caused enormous anxiety” due to the distinction made between public/masculine and private/feminine domains (“Invisible,” 90). Yet Wilson also recognizes that the idea of a gendered public/private sphere dichotomy is problematic, since the ideological separation was not always so distinct in practice (“Invisible,” 98). In effect, the Raquins’ space in the Passage du Pont-Neuf resists such a clear division. The close proximity of the “public” shop and the “private” flat undermines the separation of the two spheres. The main entrance to the flat is essentially the shop. One must enter and traverse the shop to get to the spiral staircase leading to the rooms upstairs (although a second staircase connects to Thérèse and Camille’s bedroom from an alley below, but only Laurent makes use of this entrance during his affair with Thérèse). As an entryway, the shop becomes an extension of the flat. Similarly, the shop serves in some ways as a salon, since the living quarters above consist of only a dining room and two bedrooms.

The shop remains open until nearly 10 o'clock at night, and the Raquins pass the evening there much as they would in a living room. The description of a typical evening in the Raquins' shop creates an impression of domesticity:

D'ordinaire, il y avait deux femmes assises derrière le comptoir: la jeune femme au profil grave et une vieille dame qui souriait en sommeillant... Un gros chat tigré, accroupi sur un angle du comptoir, la regardait dormir.

Plus bas, assis sur une chaise, un homme d'une trentaine d'années lisait ou causait à demi-voix avec la jeune femme. (7)

Later, when Laurent enters the lives of the Raquins, he becomes a regular visitor in the shop: "La boutique du passage du Pont-Neuf devint pour lui une retraite charmante, chaude, pleine de paroles et d'attentions amicales ... Jusqu'à dix heures, il restait là, assoupi, digérant, se croyant chez lui" (22). The intimacy of the shop gives Laurent the sense that he is in the "private" realm of not just a home, but his own home.

Conversely, the flat seems at times like a "public" sphere, particularly to the Thursday night guests. Michaud, Grivet and the others feel entitled to occupy the space, so much so that, one Thursday evening shortly after Camille's death, they arrive unannounced, ready to resume "leurs chères habitudes, sans se montrer importuns" (58). Mme Rauquin quickly accommodates the "guests," illustrating Wilson's point that the nineteenth-century private sphere "was organized for the convenience, rest and recreation of men, not women," and that it was furthermore "the workplace of the woman" ("Invisible," 98).

On Thursday evenings, the flat becomes a sort of “public” place, and the shop, in turn, serves as a “private” refuge for Thérèse. When occasional customers ring the bell on the shop door, Thérèse flees the parties that cause in her “une angoisse inexprimable” (17). She lingers in the shop after the customers leave:

Quand elle se trouvait seule, elle s’asseyait derrière le comptoir, elle demeurait là le plus longtemps possible, redoutant de remonter, goûtant une véritable joie à ne plus avoir Grivet et Olivier devant les yeux. L’air humide calmait la fièvre qui brûlait ses mains. Elle retombait dans cette rêverie grave qui était ordinaire. (17)

Serving the customers is Thérèse’s pretext for regaining the solitude that will allow her to brood. The shop, a “public” realm, thus allows her more privacy than her home. After Camille’s murder, when Thérèse spends sleepless nights “haunted” by her husband’s ghost, the shop becomes once more a place of escape:

Thérèse, lorsque le crépuscule était venu, n’osait plus monter dans sa chambre; elle éprouvait des angoisses vives, quand il lui fallait s’enfermer jusqu’au matin dans cette grande pièce, qui s’éclairait de lueurs étranges et se peuplait de fantômes, dès que la lumière était éteinte. (71)

The danger that awaits Thérèse in her bedroom, even if it is a projection of her own mental anguish, belies the presumed safety of the home. As Wilson indicates, the placement of women in the private sphere is problematic because “the bourgeois home was not in practice a safe haven” (“Invisible” 98).

The separation of public and private spheres in the Passage du Pont-Neuf becomes even more ambiguous if we consider Benjamin’s characterization of the arcade.

Benjamin sees the arcade as a dialectical image. It is a “house no less than street,” and “something between a street and an *intérieur*” (Writer, 41, 68). Elsewhere, he compares the arcade to a “drawing room,” which brings to mind the salon-like function of the Raquin shop (Arcades 423). For Mme Raquin, the conflation of public and private space results from her confinement to the *passage* as both shopkeeper and housekeeper. The flâneur in the arcade is likewise in both spheres at once. Priscilla Ferguson has explained his ambiguous setting:

If, as contemporaries reiterate, the arcades offer the flâneur a privileged site, they do so because the space they offer is at once public and private. The flâneur in the arcade entertains a singular relationship to the city, one that is emblematic of his relationship to society at large: he is neither fully outside, on the street, nor altogether inside, in the shops. (35)

Of course, Mme Raquin is inside the shop, not strolling through the arcade, gazing at the displays in the windows. It is this essential immobility that distinguishes her from the flâneur.

As we have seen, Camille is at liberty to explore Paris beyond the Passage du Pont-Neuf, and this freedom requires the confinement of his mother and wife to the shop. In fact, the Raquins relocate to Paris in order to please Camille alone. His first sight of the family’s new residence does not inspire the dread that causes Thérèse to feel that she has been buried alive. He instead consoles himself with the fact that he can leave the *passage* once he finds a comfortable office job: “Jamais le jeune homme n’aurait consenti à habiter un pareil taudis, s’il n’avait compté sur les douceurs tièdes de son bureau. Il se disait qu’il aurait chaud tout le jour à son administration, et que, le soir, il se coucherait

de bonne heure.” And during the month that he spends seeking work, Camille avoids the *passage* in the day: “Il vivait le moins possible dans la boutique, il flânait toute la journée” (14).

Camille’s flânerie does not end once he begins his bureaucratic job. He follows long, indirect routes to and from work each day, strolling along the Seine and taking in the sights. His leisurely pace, curiosity about his surroundings, pleasurable gaze, and ultimate detachment from the urban scene are the marks of the quintessential flâneur. On the other hand, his gaze is decidedly unreflective. He “ne pensait à rien” while looking at the flowing Seine descended by barges and the renovations to Notre-Dame, which “l’amusaient, sans qu’il sût pourquoi” (15). He mechanically counts, rather than thoughtfully considers, the carriages departing from the Port aux Vins. Ambling through the Jardin des Plantes, he recollects some inane story told at work, and, like a child at the zoo, watches the lumbering bears.

Camille differs markedly from the “observateur passionné” that Baudelaire describes in “Le Peintre de la vie moderne” (*Oeuvres*, 691). Baudelaire’s flâneur derives pleasure from the paradoxically fleeting and infinite nature of modernity, ephemeral images that offer insight into “la vie universelle”: “il regarde couler le fleuve de la vitalité, si majestueux et si brillant. Il admire l’éternelle beauté et l’étonnante harmonie de la vie dans les capitales, harmonie si providentiellement maintenue dans le tumulte de la liberté humaine” (692). I would suggest that the two distinct models of the flâneur’s gaze presented by Zola and Baudelaire reflect the writers’ divergent literary tendencies. Baudelaire’s flâneur manifests the lingering influence of Romanticism, particularly in his

strong emotional response to his environment. Yet we also see signs of Symbolism in Baudelaire's premise that truths are known indirectly, that modernity is witnessed and experienced in the bustle of the crowd. Zola's unsentimental depiction of Camille demonstrates the novelist's attempt at objectivity, but his ultimately unflattering account is symptomatic of the pessimistic side of Naturalism. The *scientific* detachment that Zola aims to achieve thus contrasts with the *poetic* detachment of Baudelaire, a quality that the latter also ascribes to his heroic flâneur. Despite this fundamental difference, of all of the characters in Thérèse Raquin, Camille is in the best position to be a flâneur, given his spectatorship and freedom to roam. Notably, many of the novel's references to places in Paris occur in the scenes of his wandering through the city. If the doltish Camille is not a flâneur in the Baudelairian sense, we can at the very least acknowledge that he engages in another sort of flânerie.

Like Camille, Laurent is able to move freely and inconspicuously throughout the city, and his mobility is worth examining with respect to the flâneur identity. Early in the novel, Laurent wanders through the city in order to delay his return to the garret that poverty forces him to call home. At this point, Zola introduces the image of Laurent strolling along the banks of the Seine, an activity Laurent will repeat throughout the novel and which doubles the motif of water, associated with the humidity of the Passage du Pont-Neuf and the drowning of Camille. Idleness is a significant aspect of Laurent's flânerie. He is in essence "un paresseux" who dreams of a life of leisure and sensual pleasure (20). These desires, more than his passion for Thérèse, push him eventually to kill Camille. He imagines his life after the murder: "Camille mort, il épousait Thérèse, il

héritait de Mme Raquin, il donnait sa démission et *flânait* au soleil” (37) (my emphasis).

In this scenario, *flânerie* would once again depend on the work – and resulting immobilization – of the Raquin women.

Paradoxically, however, Laurent’s crime undermines his plan for a life of leisure. His *flânerie* is soon a manifestation of nervous restlessness. Following his nightmares of the ghost of Camille, Laurent’s terror drives him onto the streets at night: “Il lui arriva, à plusieurs reprises, de ne pas vouloir rentrer, de passer des nuits entières à marcher au milieu des rues désertes” (71). This nocturnal *flânerie* contributes to Zola’s incorporation of the vampire myth, which according to William Thierfelder has been “reversed” by virtue of Camille’s bite on Laurent’s neck in the murder scene (34). Benjamin compares the *flâneur* to yet another monster, one figured in Poe’s “The Man of the Crowd”: “the *flâneur* completely distances himself from the type of philosophical promenader, and takes on the features of the werewolf restlessly roaming a social wilderness” (Arcades 417-18).

The most macabre representation of *flânerie* in Thérèse Raquin takes place not in the Passage du Pont-Neuf or on the streets of Paris, but rather in the morgue. Troubled over the missing corpse of his victim, Laurent visits the morgue regularly to examine the newcomers. In several respects, the morgue is analogous to the Passage du Pont-Neuf. Its damp walls correspond to those of the arcade and reinforce the association between water and death, bringing to mind the drowning of Camille in the Seine and the premature “burial” of Thérèse and Mme Raquin in the dank *passage*. The glass partitions that separate the public from the corpses in the morgue resemble shop windows, and

women looking at the cadavers are akin to window shoppers: they “allaient d’un bout à l’autre du vitrage, lestement, en ouvrant de grands yeux attentifs, comme devant l’étalage d’un magasin de nouveautés” (55). The dead bodies are like still objects behind the glass, reminding us of the untouched merchandise in the arcade’s window displays.

The presence of women spectators in the morgue suggests the possibility of female *flânerie* within a morbid yet safe and socially acceptable setting. Laurent sees many women in the morgue, but one particular well-dressed dame, stopped in front of the naked body of a robust working man, receives singular attention: “La dame l’examinait, le retournait en quelque sorte du regard, le pesait, s’absorbait dans le spectacle de cet homme” (55). In this scene, it is the female gaze that is directed at the objectified male. At the same time, however, Laurent is watching the woman as she looks at the corpse, and his voyeurism undermines the power of her gaze. Furthermore, Laurent’s desire for the woman is mediated by her clothing. She becomes a sexual object by nature of her “délicieuse” skirt, and her gloved hands, “toutes petites et toutes fines,” are isolated and detached by his gaze (55).

Significantly, Laurent’s gaze is also cast on Thérèse when restlessness and desperation lead her to *flânerie*. Marriage has failed to exorcise Camille’s ghost from the murderous couple’s bedroom, and their fighting becomes constant, torturous, and violent. Mme Raquin, reduced to “une chose” in her paralytic state, can no longer distract Thérèse and Laurent from the psychological effects of their crime (102). Thérèse neglects the shop and drives away the customers. She begins to disappear for entire afternoons, and

then full days. Laurent, afraid that his wife will go to the police, then decides to follow Thérèse. He spies on her as she leaves the *passage*:

Elle était vêtue d'étoffes claires, et, pour la première fois, il remarqua qu'elle s'habillait comme une fille, avec une robe à longue traîne; elle se dandinait sur le trottoir d'une façon provocante, regardant les hommes, relevant si haut le devant de sa jupe, en la prenant à poignée qu'elle montrait tout le devant de ses jambes, ses bottines lacées et ses bas blancs ... la jeune femme marchait lentement, la tête un peu renversée, les cheveux dans le dos. Les hommes qui l'avaient regardée de face se retournaient pour la voir par derrière. (136-37)

Thérèse is conspicuous on the street, resembling at once a girl and a prostitute. Men ogle her, yet she gazes at them in turn. And Laurent, in his role as voyeur, watches the scene, but Thérèse, unlike the woman in the morgue, terrifies him. Her freedom to wander threatens his liberty, his very life: "...tandis que sa femme s'étalait au soleil sur le trottoir, traînant ses jupes, nonchalante et impudique, il venait derrière elle, pâle et frémissant, se répétant que tout était fini, qu'il ne pourrait se sauver et qu'on le guillotinerait" (137).

Yet Thérèse is not headed to the police station. She instead joins a group of women and students in a café and orders some absinthe. The ensuing scene of debauchery transfixes Laurent:

les femmes fumaient des cigarettes, les hommes embrassaient les femmes en pleine rue, devant les passants, qui ne tournaient seulement pas la tête. Les gros mots, les rires gras arrivaient jusqu'à Laurent, demeuré immobile de l'autre côté de la place, sous une porte cochère. (137)



Fig. 1. Édouard Manet, *At the Café*, 1878, Walters Art Museum.

Thérèse leaves with a young man, and Laurent observes the two entering a house. His surveillance continues as he watches them through a window: “Sa femme se montra un instant à une fenêtre ouverte du second étage. Puis il crut distinguer les mains du jeune homme blond qui se glissaient autour de la taille de Thérèse” (137). Laurent is relieved to discover the “occupation” of his wife (137). Jealousy does not trouble him, and he feels like Thérèse has become a stranger to him.

In Thérèse’s one scene of true *flânerie*, she is cast as a prostitute. As Wilson has noted: “The prostitute was a ‘public woman,’ but the problem in nineteenth-century urban life was whether every woman in the new, disordered world of the city – the public sphere of pavements, cafés and theatres – was not a public woman and thus a prostitute” (93). The implication here is that if Thérèse cannot venture out in public as a respectable woman, then she must do so as a whore. This image of Thérèse is clearly meant to indicate the extent of her depravity and madness, and the episode represents her last attempt to free herself from her crime before turning to suicide. Nevertheless, this episode seems to me to provide an intriguing alternative to Zola’s portrayal of Thérèse as a sullen and essentially passive figure in the rest of the novel.

Buck-Morss has identified prostitution as “the female version of *flânerie*,” and while this point is debatable, it is worth considering whether Thérèse is in truth a *flâneuse* in this scene (119). Wolff presupposes a clear distinction between the prostitute and the *flâneuse*, insisting that the *flâneur* is necessarily male since the nineteenth-century woman cannot travel alone throughout the city without being labeled a “streetwalker” (19). Indeed, as we have seen, in Thérèse’s two solo excursions, she is shown

respectively as an adulteress and a prostitute. In her book devoted to the flâneuse concept, Deborah Parsons has maintained that the Baudelairian prostitute differs from the flâneur in that she is always the object rather than the agent of observation (25). However, I would point out that, unlike Baudelaire's prostitute, Thérèse returns the gaze of the men who pass her. Wilson sees a parallel between the flâneur and the prostitute: "both shared an intimate knowledge of the dark recesses of human life. They understood, better than anyone, the pitiless way in which the city offered an intensity of joy that was never, somehow, fulfilled" (Sphinx, 55). This similarity seems applicable to Thérèse, who finds neither satisfaction nor escape in her flânerie: "Elle s'était en vain traînée dans tous les hôtels garnis du quartier Latin, elle avait en vain mené une vie sale et tapageuse. Ses nerfs étaient brisés, la débauche, les plaisirs physiques ne lui donnaient plus des secousses assez violentes pour lui procurer l'oubli" (140). Finally, Thérèse returns to the Passage du Pont-Neuf, where she becomes more immobilized than ever.

Benjamin characterizes the city as "a labyrinth, whose image has become part of the flâneur's flesh and blood" (Writer, 166). Within the labyrinth, the Minotaur waits to kill those who reach the center. In his introduction to Zola's Thérèse Raquin, Brian Nelson uses the same metaphor to describe Paris and the characters' movement within the city: "there is only the constant flow of the Seine and the endless maze of streets, like a labyrinth leading them back always to its centre, which is death" (xxv). I would propose that the Minotaur in Thérèse Raquin turns out to be the murderers themselves. Each time they try to leave, their flânerie returns them to the Passage du Pont-Neuf, in the

center of the maze, where ultimately they take their own lives. Thérèse and Laurent make their exit just as the Parisian arcade suffers its own death.

NOTES

¹ In the second part of his novel Illusions perdues (1839), Honoré de Balzac describes the structures of the Galeries de Bois, as well as the Parisians who congregated there, including shopkeepers, strollers, businessmen, students, and prostitutes. He comments on the popularity of the Galeries despite the squalor he attributes to them: “tout Paris est-il venu là jusqu’au dernier moment; il s’y est promené sur le plancher de bois que l’architecte a fait au-dessus des caves pendant qu’ils les bâtissait. Des regrets immenses et unanimes ont accompagné la chute de ces ignobles morceaux de bois” (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1961) 295.

² Benjamin states: “Around 1840 it was briefly fashionable to take turtles for a walk in the arcades. The flâneurs liked to have the turtles set the pace for them” (Writer 84).

CHAPTER III

LA CURÉE: GAZING ACROSS SPACES OF MODERNITY

During the Second Empire, the popularity of the Parisian arcade waned with the emergence of new spaces of modernity. The vastness of these spaces contrasts with the narrow and relatively short arcade, and their immensity is sometimes conjured by their very name: the *grand boulevard*, the *grand magasin*, for instance. If the flâneur initially sought refuge from the streets in the safety of the arcade, the urban transformations initiated by Napoleon III and his chief civic planner Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann lured the flâneur into the open air. In his study of the nineteenth-century growth of Paris, Vienna, and London, Donald Olsen has noted “the rapidity with which the bourgeoisie abandoned the *Palais Royal* and the *passages* for the new streets and boulevards of the Haussmann era,” and he has credited the cleanliness, improved drainage, and new lighting of the boulevards with opening up “hitherto highly restricted possibilities for outdoor pleasures” (225-27). In La Curée, Zola’s second novel in the Rougon-Macquart series, published in 1872, the reader joins the characters in witnessing Haussmann’s transformations of Parisian streets that open up new possibilities for flânerie. The main characters – particularly, Aristide Saccard and his wife Renée – have different experiences moving through Paris and observing the urban spectacle, and their engagement with the city is influenced in part by gender roles. Haussmann’s boulevards,

along with such spaces of modernity as the municipal park and the café, provide a context in which Zola's characters might be said to participate in *flânerie*. The question of their identity as *flâneurs* and *flâneuses* will depend not only on the mobility of their bodies, but also – and perhaps to an even greater extent – on the movement of their gaze across the urban spectacle.

Zola's male protagonist in La Curée, Aristide Saccard, arrives in Paris in early 1852, approximately a month after the coup d'état by which Louis-Napoléon has become emperor. Like Camille in Thérèse Raquin, Saccard has come to Paris from a provincial town to seek his fortune. However, while Camille's ambition is limited to rising in the ranks of the railway administration, Saccard is consumed by an appetite for great wealth. The night of his arrival, Saccard takes to the Paris streets:

il éprouva l'âpre besoin de courir Paris, de battre de ses gros souliers de provincial ce pavé brûlant d'où il comptait faire jaillir des millions. Ce fut une vraie prise de possession. Il marcha pour marcher, allant le long des trottoirs, comme en pays conquis ... L'air de Paris le grisait, il croyait entendre, dans le roulement des voitures, les voix de Macbeth, qui lui criaient: "Tu seras riche!" Pendant près de deux heures, il alla ainsi de rue en rue, goûtant les voluptés d'un homme qui se promène dans son vice... (82-83)

Saccard's solitary excursion on foot recalls the restless and aimless wandering of the *flâneur*. Yet his shoes signify his provincial origins and thereby betray his non-Parisian identity. Saccard's obsession with money further distances him from the typical *flâneur*. While Baudelaire's *flâneur*-artist of "Le Peintre de la vie moderne" is fascinated with the poetic aspects of urban modernity, Saccard views the city in terms of money to be made,

gold to be collected. These thoughts of gold dominate Saccard's every experience of Paris. He imagines gold falling like rain into the pockets of crafty opportunists (111). The riches that he eventually gains from real estate speculations only whet his appetite, as illustrated by his sensation of diving repeatedly into an ocean of gold coins and swimming vigorously to stay afloat (142). Saccard's preoccupation with wealth is symptomatic of what Zola sees as a fever of greed and lust gripping Paris of the Second Empire: "...on sentait le détraquement cérébral, le cauchemar doré et voluptueux d'une ville folle de son or et de sa chair" (163).

Saccard thus sees Paris through gold-colored glasses, and one particular episode before he makes his fortune drives this point home. Dining at a window-side table in a restaurant atop Montmartre, Saccard and his first wife, Angèle, contemplate the city below. The setting sun casts "une poussière d'or, une rosée d'or" over the Right Bank near the Madeleine church and the Tuileries Palace, creating a vision of a magical, bejeweled city from Les Mille et une nuits (112). Prophetically, the houses seem to melt "comme un lingot d'or dans un creuset," and once again, Saccard envisions gold coins raining down on the city (112). In addition, images of water and fire intermingle to evoke movement and energy in Paris at the start of Haussmannization. From above, Saccard sees the city as an "océan de maisons aux toits bleuâtres, pareils à des flots pressées emplissant l'immense horizon" and a "mer vivante et pullulante" (112). Later, when nightfall obscures the view, "la ville devint confuse, on l'entendit respirer largement, comme une mer dont on ne voit plus que la crête pâle des vagues" (114). The gaslights "semblaient empiler sur deux rangs leurs taches d'or" on the sidewalks, and

Saccard is “ravis de ce ruissellement de ‘pièces de vingt francs,’ qui finit par embraser Paris entier” (115). This description of a stream of gold coins unites the images of water and money. Saccard’s vision of houses dissolving like a bar of gold in a melting pot prefigures the wealth to be made from the destruction of old Paris. It appears to him that the “quartier bout dans l’alambic de quelque chimiste,” and, in fact, the transformation of houses into gold is tantamount to alchemy, as speculators like Saccard will profit from doomed houses by manipulating the value of the property (113).

The scene at Montmartre occurs during the early days of Saccard’s career at the Hôtel-de-Ville, where his influential brother has secured him a low-level job that nonetheless allows him insight into the demolition and reconstruction plans of Napoleon III and Haussmann. Surveying Paris from Montmartre, Saccard hints at this inside knowledge. Changes have already begun in the city, as he indicates to Angèle: “Regarde là-bas, du côté des Halles, on a coupé Paris en quatre...” (113). This division results from “la grande croisée,” two intersecting axes whose creation David Jordan, in his comprehensive study of Haussmann, identifies as the prefect’s “inaugural project”: an east-west axis along the Champs-Élysées and the Rue de Rivoli; and the north-south axis crossing the Right and Left Banks along the boulevards de Strasbourg, de Sébastopol, and Saint-Michel (186).

According to Walter Benjamin, Napoleon III and Haussmann were primarily motivated by a will to prevent Parisians from erecting barricades, as rioters had done most recently during the revolution of 1848 (Writer 43). With wider boulevards, insurgents would theoretically find it more difficult to create obstructions, and the

straight, direct routes would allow armies to reach problem areas more easily. Barracks were even placed in certain areas. In La Curée, Saccard alludes to these measures when he mentions the “admirables voies stratégiques qui mettront les forts au cœur des vieux quartiers” (114). However, Jordan believes that this military intent is often overstated, and he points to aesthetic reasons for the new boulevards. Throughout Paris, in both volatile and stable areas, the newly created streets shared the same characteristics; they were “broad, purposeful thoroughfares connecting monuments, radiating from *places*, endowed with uniform architecture, and their perspectives closed at each end by some public structure” (195) (Jordan’s emphasis). Considering this attention to symmetry and visual consistency, Haussmann’s boulevards seem designed less to mitigate the effects of the riotous impulses of Parisians than to direct – even control – their gaze. While the new boulevards encourage *flânerie* in the open air, they threaten the *flâneur*’s ability to allow his eye to “wander” and consequently undermine the authority of his gaze.

By contrast, Saccard’s panoramic gaze from Montmartre is controlling, rather than controlled. In his study of nineteenth-century literary representations of Paris, Christopher Prendergast has noted that authors of this period often place their characters on higher ground in order to present a panoramic perspective; Saccard views Paris from Montmartre, as Rastignac does from the Père Lachaise cemetery in Balzac’s 1835 novel Le Père Goriot (48-49).¹ One of Benjamin’s notes for The Arcades Project reveals that the German critic saw a similarity between the Prefect of the Seine and Balzac’s protagonist: “Haussmann, who, faced with the city plan of Paris, takes up Rastignac’s cry of ‘À nous deux maintenant!’” (145). Saccard also has a plan to conquer Paris, and his

initial conquest is accomplished through his gaze. In the essay “Walking in the City” from his seminal work L’invention du quotidien, Michel de Certeau reflects on the nature of observation of an expansive metropolis from above (in his case, the view is of New York City from the World Trade Center). He maintains that the spectator is the god-like reader of the city, which becomes a text by virtue of its distance from the spectator. The high altitude “mue en lisibilité la complexité de la ville et fige en un texte transparent son opaque mobilité” (173).

Indeed, Paris is a text that Saccard reads from his dominant position. The famous map upon which Napoleon III and Haussmann marked the plans for the transformations of Paris has come alive before Saccard’s eyes.² In addition to the *grande croisée*, Saccard points out streets that he knows will be created, networks connected to the central crossing. His descriptions equate the transformations with violent acts: “...une entaille; puis, de ce côté, une autre entaille... une autre dans celui-ci, une entaille là, une entaille plus loin, des entailles partout. Paris haché à coups de sabre, les veines ouvertes, nourrissant cent mille terrassiers et maçons...” (113-14). Saccard’s attack on a personified Paris emerges as a key image. Watching her husband, Angèle experiences “un vague effroi, de voir ce petit homme se dresser au-dessus du géant couché à ses pieds, et lui montrer le poing, en pinçant ironiquement les lèvres” (113). With its fierce motions, his hand seems to slash across a tranquil, dozing Paris, asleep for the night but also to the changes in store. Saccard’s hand is a “couteau vivant,” with “doigts de fer qui hachaient sans pitié l’amas sans bornes des toits sombres,” creating a disconcerting image: “La petitesse de cette main, s’acharnant sur une proie géante, finissait par

inquiéter; et, tandis qu'elle déchirait sans effort les entrailles de l'énorme ville, on eût dit qu'elle prenait un étrange reflet d'acier, dans le crépuscule bleuâtre" (114). If Saccard's panoramic gaze represents his attempt to master the city through observation (and, in fact, he will succeed by acting upon what he has observed), then his gestures align him with Haussmann and signify the violence that the Emperor and Baron are inflicting on the city.

The Montmartre episode is rich with images of Paris seen through Saccard's eyes that help to define Zola's protagonist. At first glance, Saccard does not exhibit the obvious signs of *flânerie*. His view of the street is too remote to be the experience of the *flâneur*. Baudelaire's *flâneur* is at home in the crowd: "La foule est son domaine, comme l'air est celui de l'oiseau, comme l'eau celui du poisson. Sa passion et sa profession, c'est d'épouser la foule" (*Oeuvres*, 691). Unlike Baudelaire's "homme des foules," Saccard is too far from the crowd to distinguish a human presence (*Oeuvres*, 689). Rather than exploring the streets laid out for him, he is imaginarily creating new streets. If Saccard reads Paris as a map, then he sees only the trajectories and not the travelers. De Certeau explains in Marxist terms that the act of surveying routes is divorced from their means of creation:

Les relevés de parcours perdent ce qui a été: l'acte même de passer. L'opération d'aller, d'errer, ou de "relicher les vitrines," autrement dit l'activité des passants, est transposée en points qui composent sur le plan une ligne totalisante et réversible. Ne s'en laisse donc appréhender qu'une relique, posée dans le non-temps d'une surface de projection. Visible, elle a pour effet de rendre invisible l'opération qui l'a rendue possible. (180)

For de Certeau, walkers create the text of the city, with movements that are essentially “énonciations piétonnières” (180). This view correlates with Baudelaire’s representation of the flâneur as an artist, but instead of the city providing material for the artist, the very act of flânerie creates the city. By contrast, Saccard is removed from this creative process; indeed, his slashes across Paris and the implied razing of buildings are fundamentally destructive acts.

Such anomalies notwithstanding, Saccard resembles the flâneur in respect to other aspects of his gaze. Baudelaire sees the flâneur not as an ordinary walker, but a “prince” mingling “incognito” with the crowd, a man who is always somewhat distanced in terms of social position from those who surround him (*Oeuvres*, 692). Priscilla Ferguson, who examines various manifestations of the flâneur in nineteenth-century Paris, finds a resemblance between the socially dominant flâneur and the panorama spectator:

The disengagement that sets the flâneur apart depends upon the marked social distance, which reproduces the physical distance of the bird’s-eye view and panoramas... In both, the city revolves around the spectator, who copes with urban diversity by reducing it to a marvelous show. (31)

As he views the city from an actual and a symbolic distance, Saccard regards Paris as both a spectacle and a text. Ferguson sees the act of reading the city-text as a fundamental part of the flâneur’s experience. The dual process of observing and contemplating in which Saccard engages indicate the “reflectiveness” of his gaze, which Janet Wolff has identified in male depictions of the flâneur (21).

Although Saccard is not walking during the scene, the dinner atop Montmartre occurs at the end of a habitual stroll (Angèle “était heureuse, lorsque, *après une longue promenade*, il l’attablait dans quelque cabaret de la banlieue” [112; my emphasis]). However, Saccard’s experience of the city is singular in spite of the fact that he is not solitary in this *promenade*. For her part, Angèle is frightened by her husband’s verbal and gesticular attack on Paris, and she thus attempts to attribute Saccard’s fervor to his dark humor. This misreading of her husband’s perspective and her inability to share his conquering gaze reinforces the impression that Saccard is alone in his authoritative vision of Paris. Later, Saccard regrets having revealed his inside knowledge to Angèle, but after her death, “il ne fut pas fâché qu’elle emportât dans la terre ses bavardages des buttes Montmartre” (115). It is almost as though he has erased her from the scene.

Angèle’s marginality in the Montmartre episode and the un-reflectiveness of her gaze precludes her from the role of *flâneuse*. Moreover, she is a threat to the *flâneur* in Saccard, an impediment to his freedom of mobility, “un meuble gênant dont il avait hâte de se débarrasser” (82). For this reason, Saccard sets her up in their home in Paris before taking to the streets, and soon he is permanently “rid” of her. While Angèle lies dying, he makes arrangements to marry Renée, who is pregnant following a rape by a married man (she later miscarries). Renée’s dowry will allow Saccard to begin speculating, but before long, he recognizes other advantages to this marriage. He assesses his second wife more favorably than his first, but again in terms of domestic property. Instead of a cumbersome piece of furniture, he views her “un peu comme une de ces belles maisons qui lui faisaient honneur et dont il espérait tirer de gros profits” (147). Nonetheless,

Renée emerges as a potential flâneuse in the novel, an alternative to the oppressed Angèle, one who may challenge the male gaze. Susan Harrow has described Renée's struggle between her identity as "viewed object" and "viewing subject" as central to her character and, more generally, to the Second Empire's idealization of woman (251). In several scenes, Renée's participation alternates between observation and disregard. She is sometimes a flâneuse-like witness of the urban spectacle, and other times a participant in the drama and object of gaze.

Renée's initial appearance occurs at the very beginning the novel, in a scene set in the Bois de Boulogne. Napoleon III desired a park modeled after Hyde Park in London, and in 1852, he chose to realize this vision in a state forest, the Bois de Boulogne. Haussmann and engineer Adolphe Alphand oversaw work on the new park, which, upon completion in 1858, contained such features as winding roads and footpaths, two lakes, streams, cascades, grottos, and the Longchamps race course (Pinkney 94-99). Jordan explains that nature in the new parks of Paris was made to conform to Haussmann's aesthetic and sense of purpose: "Haussmann's parks, with their bordered paths that kept strollers off the grass, their carefully contrived sight lines and artful geometry, largely determined how they were to be enjoyed" (278). Prendergast calls the Bois de Boulogne "a pseudo-neoclassical version of the Bucolic" and "for the most part a piece of pure fakery" (167). The descriptions of the Bois that appear in the opening pages of La Curée evoke the artificiality imposed on the space, with elements of nature described as decorations. A still lake becomes a mirror, garden paths resemble yellow ribbons, and the foliage of trees seems to drape across the horizon like curtain fringe. As the sun sets,

“Ce coin de nature, ce décor qui semblait fraîchement peint, baignait dans une ombre légère, dans une vapeur bleuâtre qui achevait de donner aux lointains un charme exquis, un air d’adorable fausseté” (42-43). Larry Duffy has studied the motifs of nature and artifice in La Curée, noting that “the park itself is interiorized” and “its manufactured, lifeless contents might as well be furniture, becoming *mobilier* as a function of their immobility” (209). The Bois is a space at once interior and exterior, as Zola’s references to décor imply, just as it lies somewhere between nature and urbanity.

Despite the widespread appeal of the Bois de Boulogne to Parisians of all ages and classes, it was the elite with easy access to the western region of the capitol who made daily use of the park (Pinkney 99). Such wealthy park dwellers appear from the beginning of La Curée with the description of a traffic jam in the Bois de Boulogne. At the end of a habitual ride through the park, carriages slow to a standstill as they head toward the exit onto the Avenue de l’Impératrice. The scene is typical of the spectacle that occurred regularly at the Bois. In Paris dans les romans d’Émile Zola, Nathan Kranowski comments: “La gent riche et oisive ne voyait pas de distraction qui valait celle de s’y rencontrer pour échanger des phrases banales et faire valoir ses bijoux et ses costumes” (20). Olsen describes the Bois at the time as the “preserve of fashion” (233). Indeed, in the first scene of La Curée, “tout Paris était là ” (41). Affluent women traversing the Bois flash their sumptuous garments: “Çà et là, dans un landau découvert, éclatait un bout d’étoffe, un bout de toilette de femme, soie ou velours” (40). Carriages become fashion accessories, signifying wealth and status. Passengers silently peer from carriages; they are both observers of and performers in the spectacle: “Il y avait des

échanges de regards muets, de portières à portières” (40). This silent gazing cast by and on stylish Parisians recalls the keen eye for fashion of Baudelaire’s flâneur.³

While the rich idlers in Zola’s initial Bois episode are riders, not walkers, and thus differ fundamentally from the strolling flâneur, the act of spectatorship and the leisurely nature of the promenade – albeit by carriage – correspond with flânerie. According to Greg Thomas, the Second Empire’s new parks “functioned and were interpreted as extensions of the boulevard, staging based on the dominance of the flâneur and the view of women as objects of beauty, fashion, and family” (38). He argues that, despite this design, the parks were ultimately a liminal space in which women could challenge the authority of the male flâneur by not merely participating in the urban spectacle, but by also observing that spectacle.

In the opening scene of La Curée, Renée does much the same thing as she alternately engages in and withdraws from observation. She shares a carriage with her stepson Maxime, who, only five years her junior, will eventually become her lover. Zola depicts Maxime as an androgynous figure with both homosexual and heterosexual desires, but in this scene, he is clearly interested in watching women. At the Bois de Boulogne, his “regards déshabillaient tranquillement les femmes” (42). Maxime urges Renée to share his gaze as he points out the courtesan, Laure d’Aurigny. Renée’s attempt to participate in a masculine version of observation is underscored by her androgynous features. Her myopic squinting gives her a “mine de garçon impertinent,” and she relies on a “binocle d’homme” to examine “la grosse Laure d’Aurigny” (40). Hannah Thompson, who has studied clothing references as signifiers of gender identity in Zola’s

novels, asserts that Renée has appropriated the male flâneur's gaze through her use of a man's eyepiece to examine the women in the park (104). Yet Renée's gaze is essentially defective, as indicated by her need for optical aids due to her myopia. She can never participate without mediation in the male gaze.

Furthermore, Renée seems to find this type of observation ultimately unfulfilling: "Accoutumée aux grâces savantes de ces points de vue, Renée, reprise par ses lassitudes, avait baissé complètement les paupières, ne regardant plus que ses doigts minces qui enroulaient sur leurs fuseaux les longs poils de la peau d'ours" (43). Renée abandons the visual spectacle in the park for the physical sensation of the bearskin inside the carriage. When she looks out of the carriage again, she does so lazily, "sans voir" (42). The parade through the Bois de Boulogne has become mundane for Renée: "Oh! je m'ennuie, je m'ennuie à mourir" she tells Maxime, adding later, "je veux autre chose" (44, 46).

Renée's repressed energy and daydreaming bring to mind Thérèse Raquin, particularly at the beginning of the Bois scene, when Renée wakes from a "rêve triste qui, depuis une heure, la tenait silencieuse, allongée au fond de la voiture, comme dans une chaise longue de convalescente" (40). Like Thérèse, whose "vie forcée de convalescente" causes her introversion, Renée responds to her dissatisfaction by retreating into reverie (10). At one point, Renée suddenly becomes "très triste, promenant autour d'elle ce regard désespéré des femmes qui ne savent à quel amusement se donner" (44). Thérèse has a similar moment in the Passage du Pont-Neuf. Facing the dark wall signifying the gloomy confines of the arcade, "Elle promenait sur cette muraille un regard vague, et, muette, elle venait se coucher à son tour, dans une indifférence

dédaigneuse” (8). The use of the verb “promener” is significant in showing how both heroines’ eyes stroll when their bodies will not or cannot. However, while Thérèse feels restricted by the claustrophobic *passage* and her semi-incestuous marriage, Renée is overwhelmed by a life that is somehow too open to possibilities for material and sensual indulgence.

The open space of the Bois de Boulogne heightens Renée’s ennui much as the confines of the Passage du Pont-Neuf reinforce Thérèse’s torpor. As the sun sets and the landscape becomes hazy, Renée looks outside once: “Renée regardait, les yeux fixes, comme si cet agrandissement de l’horizon, ces prairies molles, trempées par l’air du soir, lui eussent fait sentir plus vivement le vide de son être” (44). Zola uses pathetic fallacy to establish a bond between Renée and her surroundings. The sky, like Renée, is melancholic, suffers from “une tristesse vague” (47). Moreover, the artificiality of the Bois constitutes a perversion of nature, which will be duplicated in Renée’s semi-incestuous affair with her stepson. Her transgression is foreshadowed as she reacts to her view of the landscape overcome by nightfall:

Renée, dans ses satiétés, éprouva une singulière sensation de désirs inavouables, à voir ce paysage qu’elle ne reconnaissait plus, cette nature si artistement mondaine, et dont la grande nuit frissonnante faisait un bois sacré, une de ces clairières idéales au fond desquelles les anciens dieux cachaient leurs amours géantes, leurs adultères et leurs incestes divins.
(47)

Nature is “mondaine” and the Bois has transformed into a mythical place, where perverse pleasures – adultery, incest – are part of the natural order. Renée’s gaze is thus

characterized by longing for something beyond the luxuries that the Second Empire has to offer.

Like the *flâneur*, Renée has the freedom to be idle. Yet, as demonstrated by her regular carriage promenades through the Bois de Boulogne, Renée's leisure activities are confined to spaces deemed socially acceptable. The ennui that she experiences may be a consequence of the conflict between societal constraints and her "*curiosité inassouvie*" fostered by the decadence of the Second Empire (45). Renée challenges the restrictions placed on her access to certain social spaces when she convinces Maxime to take her to a masquerade hosted by an actress. Renée disguises herself under a long, dark, hooded cloak, a "*domino*," in order to enter a place where her presence would otherwise be inappropriate for a woman of her status. The party does not satisfy Renée's yearning for new pleasures, so she accompanies Maxime to another space otherwise off-limits to her – a café.

En route to the Café Riche, Renée has an impulse to jump from the carriage to the street, but she is not so daring. In fact, at their destination, she meekly climbs down "*avec des mines d'oiseau qui craint de se mouiller les pattes*" (175). Renée's timidity tinged with excitement highlights the contrast between her typical sheltered mode of transportation and the thrilling city street: "*Ce trottoir qu'elle sentait sous ses pieds lui chauffait les talons, lui donnait, à fleur de peau, un délicieux frisson de peur et de caprice contenté*" (175). Awareness of the impropriety of her presence in this space and fear of being discovered increase the pleasure she feels and ultimately underscore her foreignness to this realm. This foreignness is made even more apparent by Maxime's

movement up the café stairs “comme s’il était chez lui” juxtaposed with Renée’s pant-inducing climb (176).

However, Renée is protected from discovery first by her domino, which hides her identity and class, and next by the couple’s retreat into a private dining room. She immediately notices and derives pleasure from the suggestive décor of the space, including a large divan – in effect, “un véritable lit” (176). While this room offers the intimacy of a bedroom, the open window overlooking the street allows the activity from the boulevard to penetrate the room. Strollers intrude into the *cabinet* via their shadows: “sur le plafond, dans les reflets du café d’en bas, passaient les ombres rapides des promeneurs” (176). Sounds from the exterior likewise fill the room, beginning with a rumble: “Un roulement continu entrainé par la fenêtre grande ouverte” (177). The noise intensifies as the scene progresses: “Le bruit assourdissant qui montait avait une clameur” (179). Renée must raise her voice to be heard, but when Maxime complains about the din, she dubs it “l’orchestre” that will accompany their meal of oysters and partridge (180). The “orchestra” will also provide the soundtrack to the couple’s incestuous act. The noises and vibrations of the street substitute for a narrative account of Renée and Maxime’s lovemaking, furthering the conflation of the bedroom-like dining space and the boulevard: “Dans le grand silence du cabinet... elle sentit le sol trembler et entendit le fracas de l’omnibus des Batignolles... Et tout fut dit” (185).

The intrusion of the street into the room undermines the opposition of public and private space. Zola further subverts this dichotomy by connecting Renée to the females strolling on the boulevard below. In her analysis of the nineteenth-century gendered

separation of spheres, Janet Wolff has indicated that women who frequented public spaces – including the café – did not enjoy the anonymity of men in public and consequently risked the label of prostitute (19). Zola makes explicit this very connection between the women on the boulevard and streetwalkers. Through the open window, Renée watches as the “filles” (another term for prostitute) “traînaient leurs jupes, qu’elles relevaient de temps à autre, d’un mouvement alangui, en jetant autour d’elles des regards las et souriants” (178). The self-display of the prostitutes and their active looking recall Thérèse Raquin’s promiscuous behavior during her brief moment of flânerie. Thérèse ultimately prostitutes herself in the scene, and Zola’s portrayal in both novels of female strollers/café dwellers as prostitutes mirrors the nineteenth-century perception of the solitary woman in public as non-respectable. In *La Curée*, Renée is branded as a prostitute from the moment that she enters the private dining room of the Café Riche, when the waiter regards her as another woman that Maxime has brought up from the street. This intimate space within a public establishment and its “coquetteries de boudoir” evoke a brothel room (176). The street has a similar implicit connection with the brothel as a place where liaisons are arranged: “les groupes arrêtés dans un coin d’ombre faisaient du trottoir le corridor de quelque grande auberge à l’heure où les voyageurs gagnent leur lit de rencontre” (183).

In another sense, Renée resembles the prostitutes on the street by virtue of her semi-incestuous relation with Maxime, but she is most closely aligned to one particular woman who catches her eye. This woman sits alone at a café table and sips a glass of beer, much as Renée will “goûter au fruit défendu” in the private café room (175). The

blue dress of the woman corresponds to the blue hair ribbon that brightens Renée's otherwise dark ensemble. The lone woman has "un air d'attente lourde et résignée," presumably awaiting sexual submission to a customer, much as Renée anticipates and abandons herself to her relations with Maxime (178). After the moment of consummation between stepmother and stepson, Renée returns to the window and spies the woman in blue, alone on a corner, "toujours en quête" (183). It would seem that Renée herself is still in search of something indefinable, and that the semi-incestuous act failed to dispel her ennui. As the evening nears an end, Renée can still make out the woman in blue, "seule dans la solitude grise, debout à la même place, attendant et s'offrant aux ténèbres vides," just as Renée offers herself to the moral obscurity (187).

Renée's stillness at the window may call into question her potential as *flâneuse*. To some extent, perhaps she engages vicariously in *flânerie*. As the female strollers mingle in the crowd, Renée seems to move with them: "la jeune femme... les suivait du regard, allait d'un bout du boulevard à l'autre" (178). Moreover, like the *flâneur*, Renée participates in detached observation. She spends most of the scene looking out of the window, and descriptions of the street below dominate the narrative. She observes from above, but she is too close to the street for the view to be panoramic, in contrast to Saccard's totalizing perspective from Montmartre. In his examination of the literary use of the window to frame the Paris spectacle, Prendergast argues that Renée does not adopt the position of the *flâneur* because she is not on the street and does not have the freedom of mobility essential to the *flâneur* (43). Yet the conflation of the street and café room,

compounded by Renée's alignment with the women strollers, may nonetheless allow for a reading of her as *flâneuse*, particularly in light of the nature of her gaze.

The gaze, which Zola privileges in his characters' experiences of their surroundings, is in fact vital to the identity of the *flâneur*. In "Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity," Griselda Pollock notes: "The *flâneur* symbolizes the privilege or freedom to move about the public areas of the city observing but rarely interacting, consuming the sights through a controlling but rarely acknowledged gaze" (67). For Pollock, the gaze of Baudelaire's *flâneur* figure is essentially a male perspective in which women become objects. Since women in nineteenth century society could not be inconspicuous in a crowd, they could not participate in this "detached" and objectifying observation (71). Thompson has interpreted Renée's domino as a "transvestite" garment that obscures not only her class, but also her gender, and the role of the disguise "suggests that it is the concealment of her feminine gender identity which allows her to view the city as she does" (108). I would argue that while this is certainly a form of emancipation, it does not constitute a significant threat to the male gaze. Renée sees the strollers as not quite human, a procession of "*petites poupées mécaniques*" (178). The prostitutes in particular have an air of "*marionettes blafardes*" (182).⁴ Renée may identify with the women on the street, but she also objectifies them as she replicates the male perspective. Her transvestism establishes her role as a man looking at women in the conventional mode of visual domination.

The transvestism of Renée is complemented and bolstered by the androgyny of Maxime. Her stepson and imminent lover is attracted by her masculinity: "Par moments,

il n'était plus bien sûr de son sexe... son air indécis de myope en faisaient un grand jeune homme" (184). Later, during the ride home from the café, Maxime blames Renée's defeminized appearance for his part in the semi-incestuous act: "Il l'avait prise pour un garçon, il jouait avec elle... il ne l'aurait pas touchée du bout des doigts, si elle avait seulement montré un coin d'épaule" (188). According to Maxime, Renée is at fault for subverting gender norms, yet he fails to acknowledge that he has done the same. In his feminine role, Maxime relinquishes his male gaze to Renée as he retreats from the window, leaving her to adopt the flâneur's gaze. Renée's androgyny thereby grants her access to both the forbidden space of the café and the authority of the male gaze. However, in trading roles, Renée and Maxime reinforce normative heterosexuality and gender roles. When she acts as the "male" observer in the scene, Renée seems to be impersonating the flâneur rather than offering a new model of the flâneuse with an alternate gaze.

Similarities indeed exist between Baudelaire's account of the flâneur's perspective and Renée's visual experience of the city street. Zola's wave imagery used to describe the crowd (178, 182) and the incessant movement on the boulevard ("un va-et-vient continu" [178]) are analogous to the fleeting experience of modernity in which Baudelaire's flâneur seeks a sense of universality. The coupling of the fugitive and the universal is displayed through the window of the Café Riche: "le défilé repassait sans fin, avec une régularité fatigante, monde étrangement mêlé et toujours le même" (178). Baudelaire's flâneur and Renée both attempt to blend into their surroundings in order to observe inconspicuously these images of modernity. However, Renée's domino is a

disguise that she will eventually need to shed. Even as she wears it, she cannot fully escape the male gaze of Maxime; he may see her as androgynous, but he retains the authority to objectify her, if not as a woman, then as a boy. In another key moment, men passing on an omnibus momentarily return Renée's gaze, watching the couple "du regard curieux des affamés mettant l'œil à une serrure," thereby asserting their voyeuristic privilege and challenging Renée's authority to look. (178).

Renée's flawed approximation of the male gaze and her vicarious experience of *flânerie* on the boulevard may indicate that she cannot fully accept the designation of *flâneuse*. Nonetheless, at one point in the novel, Renée does engage in a solitary promenade through the streets of Paris, and the episode highlights the implications of female *flânerie* for nineteenth-century women. One evening, as she returns from her bourgeois father's *hôtel* on the Île Saint-Louis, to which she has traveled on foot because her father dislikes carriage noise, Renée notices a young man following her on the Quai Saint-Paul. Instead of heading straight home, she takes the Rue du Temple, "promenant son gallant le long des boulevards" (150). Renée is filled with both fear and excitement as the man pursues her through the streets. She eventually leads him into the shop of her discreet sister-in-law, and Renée will return to the shop two more times for a tryst with the stranger. This episode demonstrates the danger of the city streets for a lone woman, although Renée is a willing prey: "Cet amour de rencontre, trouvé et accepté dans la rue, fut un de ses plaisirs les plus vifs" (150). Regardless, the identification with the prostitute is once again inevitable for the female stroller.

The Paris streets figure prominently in Renée's search for pleasure and distraction from the emptiness of her life, as we see in her fling with the stranger and also in her relationship with Maxime. As lovers, Renée and Maxime meander throughout the newly transformed city. They often "faisaient un détour, pour passer par certains boulevards qu'ils aimaient d'une tendresse personnelle" (228). Their love affair plays out on the streets of Haussmann's Paris: "Ils roulaient toujours... Chaque boulevard devenait un couloir de leur hôtel" (229). While Saccard profits from the piercing of new boulevards, Renée and Maxime endorse their creation. However, Renée experiences the city mostly from within a carriage rather than as a pedestrian. Her *flânerie* by carriage indicates both her privilege and her marginality, for she is prevented from walking on the boulevards by her access to transportation as well as her need to appear respectable. Yet in the end, rather than protecting Renée's innocence, the carriage enables her to act out her debauched desires. If the streets are the hallways of their lovers' abode, then the carriage is its bedroom. Like the Café Riche, the boulevards of Paris represent a realm that is at once public and private. As Renée explores Paris through physical displacement made possible by the carriage or a wandering gaze cast through the café window, she is still positioned in the private realm, which indicates the limits of her relationship with the urban environment.

The boulevards, the Café Riche, and the Bois de Boulogne are ambiguous realms without clear divisions along public/private, exterior/interior, and natural/artificial lines. The absence of clear boundaries is mirrored in the blurred gender and familial relations in the novel, particularly with respect to the question of incest. Zola attributes the deviation

of nature and the erosion of the family to the corrupt and greedy environment of the Second Empire. He explains this to Louis Ulbach, writer and editor of “La Cloche”:

J’ai voulu, dans cette nouvelle Phèdre, montrer à quel effroyable écoulement on en arrive, lorsque les mœurs sont pourries et que les liens de la famille n’existent plus. Ma Renée, c’est la Parisienne affolée, jetée au crime par le luxe et la vie à outrance; mon Maxime, c’est le produit d’une société épuisée, l’homme-femme, la chair inerte qui accepte les dernières infamies; mon Aristide, c’est le spéculateur né des bouleversements de Paris, l’enrichi impudent, qui joue à la Bourse avec tout ce qui lui tombe sous la main, femmes, enfants, honneur, pavés, conscience. (Correspondance 304)⁵

While Zola stops short of denouncing the creation of new spaces for flânerie and spectatorship in the city, he sees the transformations of Paris as providing a context for corruption and the resulting dissolution of the family.

It is not until her inevitable rejection by Maxime, who marries another woman, and her exploitation by Saccard, who speculates with her family property, that Renée realizes to what extent she is a victim of the debauchery and corruption of Second Empire Paris. In the final scene, she returns to her father’s *hôtel* and gazes at Paris through another window, but her perspective is now one of defeat rather than authority:

Elle songeait à la ville complice, au flamboiement des nuits du boulevard, aux après-midi ardents du Bois, aux journées blafardes et crues des grands hôtels neufs. Puis, quand elle baissa la tête, qu’elle revit d’un regard le paisible horizon de son enfance, ce coin de cité bourgeoise et ouvrière où elle rêvait une vie de paix, une amertume dernière lui vint aux lèvres. Les mains jointes, elle sanglota dans la nuit tombante. (338)

Renée is ultimately caught between the seductive yet heartless new Paris and the irretrievable old Paris. Such is the experience of the flâneur as he moves from the refuge of the arcade to the vast boulevard. The flâneur's next destination – the Parisian department store – will provide new temptations in the form of consumer goods, threatening to destroy the male flâneur in the process of establishing the flâneuse.

NOTES

¹ “Rastignac, resté seul, fit quelques pas vers le haut du cimetière et vit Paris tortueusement couché le long des deux rives de la Seine où commençaient à briller les lumières. Ses yeux s'attachèrent presque avidement entre la colonne de la place Vendôme et le dôme des Invalides, là où vivait ce beau monde dans lequel il avait voulu pénétrer. Il lança sur cette ruche bourdonnante un regard qui semblait par avance en pomper le miel, et dit ces mots grandioses: “A nous deux maintenant!” (Balzac, Honore de. Le Pere Goriot. Paris: Garnier Freres, 1963. 309.)

² Pinkney explains: “On the day when Haussmann took the oath of office as the Prefect of the Seine, Napoleon handed him a map of Paris on which he had drawn in four contrasting colors (the colors indicating the relative urgency he attached to each project) the streets that he proposed to build. This map... became the basic plan for the transformation of the city in the following two decades” (25). In La Curée, Saccard may have glimpsed this very map: “Dans ses courses continuelles à travers l’Hôtel de Ville, il avait surpris le vaste projet de la transformation de Paris, le plan de ces démolitions, de ces voies nouvelles et de ces quartiers improvisés” (91).

³ Baudelaire’s flâneur notices every fashion detail: “Si une mode, une coupe de vêtement a été légèrement transformée, si les noeuds de rubans, les boucles ont été détrônés par les cocardes, si le bavolet s’est élargi et si le chignon est descendu d’un cran

sur la nuque, si la ceinture a été exhaussée et la jupe amplifiée, croyez qu'à une distance énorme son oeil d'aigle l'a déjà deviné" (Oeuvres, 693).

⁴ These images seem like a less sinister version of the Thursday night guests in Thérèse Raquin that remind the title character of "cadavres mécaniques" and "poupées de carton" (17, 18). Thérèse and Renée both assert the power of their gaze to turn people into dolls and puppets in an effort to cope with their oppressive circumstances.

⁵ Zola composed the letter on November 6, 1871, a day after installments of La Curée were discontinued in "La Cloche" as a result of political pressure.

CHAPTER IV

AU BONHEUR DES DAMES: THE FLÂNEUSE SHOPS

In his essay “Paris, The Capital of the Nineteenth Century,” Walter Benjamin proclaims: “The department store is the last promenade for the flâneur” (Writer, 40). Benjamin’s flâneur is inextricably set in the latter half of the nineteenth century, when the department store emerges as a site of flânerie. The Parisian *grand magasin* is the flâneur’s last haunt after the arcade and the Haussmannian boulevard, a space that welcomes his restless spirit and roaming eye. Indeed, as Benjamin notes in the same essay, the *grand magasin* “makes use of flânerie itself to sell goods” since it exploits the flâneur’s two main pastimes: strolling and looking (Writer, 40). While the Passage du Pont-Neuf in Thérèse Raquin has become essentially a thoroughfare for hurried pedestrians, the goods in its shop windows unnoticed and indistinct under layers of dust, the eponymous department store in Zola’s 1883 novel Au Bonheur des Dames is a place of leisure and spectacle, designed to lure and keep strollers under its roof. Haussmann’s *grands boulevards*, from which Aristide Saccard profits in La Curée, ensure the success of Bonheur by facilitating the movement of shoppers and goods throughout Paris and by turning promenaders on the surrounding boulevards into flâneurs in the store. Furthermore, women’s freedom to wander safely and at ease throughout the *grand magasin* earns them the new identity of flâneuse. Zola’s women in Au Bonheur des Dames appear to some extent to be female counterparts to the male flâneur as they leisurely traverse a new urban space and observe scenes

of modernity. Yet the control that Zola attributes to store owner Octave Mouret calls into question the idea of the female shopper as emancipated flâneuse.

The trajectory of the flâneur from the arcade to the new boulevards to the department store is a logical progression. These spaces are all symbols of innovation and expansion, qualities central to modernity. While the arcade fell out of fashion in the latter part of the nineteenth century, in its day, it was a structure that “strove to impress, to create a monumental effect” with its architecture and neoclassical ornamentation, as Philip Nord has observed in his study of the politics of shopkeepers in late nineteenth-century Paris (91). Indeed, the iron and glass used for the *passages couverts* were still relatively new building materials when they were incorporated into the designs of the department stores. Haussmann’s *grand boulevards* were also important to the emergence of the giant retail business known as the *grand magasin*. As David Jordan has noted, urban redevelopment in the Second Empire was a “precondition” for the formation of the department store: “The new streets, tying the several neighborhoods of the city together, made possible an intense intraurban circulation” that brought bourgeois shoppers to the department store (352). The precursor to the department store, the *magasin de nouveautés*, would not have grown into the *grand magasin* had it relied solely on the foot traffic of strollers on the boulevard. This growth depended in large part on the journey that Parisians made across town for the express purpose of participating in flânerie inside the department store.

The connection between the flâneur and the rising consumer culture was first established in the arcade. The flâneur is at home among the emblems of commerce that surround him, as Benjamin observes in “The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire”: “To him, a shiny

enameled shop sign is at least as good a wall ornament as an oil painting is to a bourgeois in his living room” (Writer, 69). Anne Friedberg has traced the evolution of what she calls the “mobilized gaze” performed by the ambulatory spectator and has identified a key shift that occurs with the rise of the *grand magasin*: “unlike the arcade, the department store offered a protected site for the empowered gaze of the flâneuse. Endowed with purchasing power, she was the target of consumer address” (37). In the department store, the gaze of women is specifically targeted to an unprecedented degree and operates within a space that she may respectably navigate on her own.

Zola’s depiction of the department store in Au Bonheur des dames is based on his observations of the first Parisian *grand magasin*, Le Bon Marché. As was the case with its real-life model, Bonheur gradually expands through the annexation of adjacent buildings and the addition of new structures (Miller 42). By the last chapter, Mouret’s department store has grown into a “colosse” that “couvrait un quartier de son ombre” (405). Even earlier in the novel, the enormity of Bonheur makes the store an ideal site for flânerie: “l’air et la lumière entraient librement, le public *circulait à l’aise*” (246) (my emphasis). The interplay of elaborate iron structures, including spiral staircases and suspension bridges, denotes “la réalisation moderne d’un palais du rêve, d’une Babel entassant des étages, élargissant des salles, ouvrant des échappées sur d’autres étages et d’autres salles, à l’infini” (261). The image of the Tower of Babel not only evokes the apparent endlessness of the space, but, as a symbol of man’s industrious attempt to reach the heavens, also indicates the degree to which capitalism supplants spirituality in the department store. Zola clearly sees shopping as a new religion practiced in this “temple” for woman that Mouret has constructed (85, 405). Yet woman herself also

worships the commodity in this “cathédrale du commerce moderne” (246). Mouret reflects on the “religion nouvelle” originating in his department store:

les églises que désertait peu à peu la foi chancelante étaient remplacées par son bazar, dans les âmes inoccupées désormais. La femme venait passer chez lui les heures vides, les heures frissonnantes et inquiètes qu’elle vivait jadis au fond des chapelles...(442)

The notion that women moved from the church to the department store in search of an equally intense experience underscores the limited number of public spaces where they could circulate during their hours of leisure.

Women’s new public pastime of department store shopping retained a connection to the domestic sphere by virtue of the household goods offered. Moreover, the department store sought to create a homelike atmosphere. Like the Bon Marché and other early department stores, Bonheur features areas of respite, including a reading room and buffet that serve to keep customers in the store. As Rachel Bowlby has remarked in her book on commercial culture depicted in Naturalist novels, the possibility of spending an entire day in a department store meant that “the fantasy world of escape from dull domesticity was also, in another way, a second home” (4). The nineteenth-century *grand magasin* presented an ambiguous realm, at once spectacular and familiar, as Geoffrey Crossick and Serge Jaimain have explained:

The freedom of entry, the great architectural presence, the anonymity of the participants, and the theatrical style all placed the department stores in the public sphere. Yet middle class women could avail themselves of salons and reading rooms with domestic decor which implied some of the protections of the private sphere. (32)

The department store was thus a transitional space as women moved toward integration in the public city.

In Au Bonheur des dames, Mouret certainly understands that his department store is like a home for women. “Elles sont chez elles, j’en connais qui passent la journée ici, à manger des gâteaux et à écrire leur correspondance,” he remarks before adding: “Il ne me reste qu’à les coucher” (266). The double meaning of “coucher” epitomizes Mouret’s strategy to seduce women with luxury goods and mesmerizing displays while evoking the domestic realm. One such display in the silk department manages to sexualize images of the home to evoke both a site of seduction and the woman seduced:

Le rayon des soieries était comme une grande chambre d’amour, drapée de blanc par un caprice d’amoureuse à la nudité de neige, voulant lutter de blancheur. Toutes les pâleurs laiteuses d’un corps adoré se retrouvaient-là, depuis le velours des reins, jusqu’à la soie fine des cuisses et au satin luisant de la gorge. (428)

The bedroom as a space representing concurrently domesticity and sexuality signals both the feminization of public space and the continued identification of woman in public with the prostitute. Mouret himself views women as both symbols of the family and sexual objects. He even creates a children’s clothing department so that he may “conquérir la mère par l’enfant” (247). His general retail success owes itself to his role as a master seducer who “cherchait sans relâche à imaginer des séductions plus grandes,” and he is ultimately contemptuous of his conquest, “plein du secret mépris de l’homme auquel une maîtresse vient de faire la bêtise de se donner” (85). In the department store, woman’s identity, be it mother, lover, mistress, or prostitute, is as ambiguous as the space itself.



Fig. 2. Félix Édouard Vallotton, *Le Bon Marché*, 1893, The University of Michigan Art Museum.

As both public and private realm, Zola's *grand magasin* recalls the liminal spaces in Thérèse Raquin and La Curée. Like the silk department that evokes a bedroom, the Raquin shop in the Passage du Pont-Neuf resembles a salon, bringing to mind Benjamin's comparison of the arcade to the drawing room in order to illustrate the flâneur's essential urbanity (Arcades 423). The conflation of public and private spaces is also seen in La Curée, where nature is made artificial by what seems to be a process of interior design. Conversely, the merchandise in Bonheur takes on qualities of the natural world. In another silk display, fabrics in aquatic shades stream down a cast-iron support column to culminate in a lake that is still but for the dancing reflections of the sky and landscape. Women lean over the lake of silk, "pâles de désirs... avec la peur sourde d'être prises dans le débordement d'un pareil luxe et avec l'irrésistible envie de s'y jeter et de s'y perdre" (112-13).

Perhaps the most striking example of nature recreated indoors is seen in the snowy contours of the white sale in the last chapter of the novel. In his history of the Bon Marché, Michael Miller has noted the importance of the *blanc*, an annual sale/spectacle that revived business during the winter off-season: "the entire store was adorned in white: white sheets, white towels, white curtains, white flowers, *ad infinitum*, all forming a single *blanc* motif that covered even stairways and balconies" (169). Zola recreates the *blanc* as a snowy scene: "les galeries s'enfonçaient, dans une blancheur éclatante, une échappée boréale, toute une contrée de neige, déroulant l'infini des steppes tendues d'hermine, l'entassement des glaciers allumés sous le soleil" (411). From a distance, shoppers look like "patineurs d'un lac de Pologne, en décembre," and those on the staircases and suspension bridges formed "une ascension sans fin de petites figures, comme égarées au milieu de pics neigeux" (413). This simulation of a snowy

vista blurs the line between winter indoors and outdoors while also creating a dream world akin to the phantasmagoric realm of Benjamin's flâneur.

The white sale dominates one of three chapters in Au Bonheur des Dames that Zola devotes to the seasonal unveiling of new merchandise in the department store (the other two are the "nouveauautés d'hiver" in Chapter 4 and the "nouveauautés d'été" in Chapter 9). It is during these scenes that most of the female flânerie in the novel occurs. Each exposition is a big success, with Bonheur overrun by crowds of shoppers and spectators. Mme Guibal is but one of the flâneuses in the store: "...depuis une heure, [elle] marchait dans le magasin, d'un pas de promenade, donnant à ses yeux la joie des richesses entassées, sans acheter seulement un mètre de calicot" (116). This option of wandering alone and looking, but not necessarily buying, in a safe and respectable zone was new to nineteenth-century women. Friedberg has posited: "The female flâneur... was not possible until she was free to roam the city on her own. And this was equated with the privilege of shopping on her own" (36). Flânerie in the department store became possible with the adoption of the policy of *entrée libre* to individuals with or without the intention to buy, and also with the clear marking of fixed prices that precluded the need to negotiate with the seller. As Lisa Tiersten explains:

Crossing the threshold of the *grand magasin*, the flâneuse became a browser, with no obligation to strike up a conversation with the sales personnel or other customers or even to make a purchase. She could continue her urban promenade unmolested through the vast spaces of the department store, circulating freely, a spectator rather than a participant. (120)

Pressure to buy was replaced by visual enticements, and shopping was transformed from a chore to a leisure activity.

The policy of *entrée libre* and the display of *prix uniques* may have encouraged the autonomy of women in the department store, but such innovations also contributed to the overall impersonality of commercial relations that feeds the modern sense of alienation. The sales clerks at Bonheur know little about the customers and seem to care less, as demonstrated by their attitude toward one woman in particular: “Tout le magasin la connaissait, savait qu’elle se nommait Mme Boutarel et qu’elle habitait Albi, sans s’inquiéter du reste, ni de sa situation, ni de son existence” (100). By stark contrast, all of the sales clerks are curious about an elegant blond that they have dubbed “la jolie dame”: “Depuis des années, elle venait, et on ne savait toujours rien d’elle, ni sa vie, ni son adresse, ni même son nom. Aucun, du reste, ne tâchait de savoir, bien que tous, à chacune de ses apparitions, se permissent des hypothèses, simplement pour causer” (428). One day, she arrives in mourning clothes, prompting the sales clerks to wonder if she is grieving for her husband or father. In the case of the “jolie dame,” the impersonality of the department store renders her a mysterious figure.

The “jolie dame” bears a resemblance to the object of the flâneur’s gaze in Baudelaire’s poem “À une passante.”¹ The “passante” and the “jolie dame” are both strangers, fleeting beauties whose appearance causes a shock in the men that they encounter. Their mourning clothes give them a sad beauty and connect their ephemeral image to the brevity of life. As lone walkers, both women might be characterized as flâneuses. Yet in both cases, the woman is the object of the male gaze, and not the holder of the gaze. Priscilla Ferguson has argued that women are necessarily excluded from the “fraternity of flâneurs” because of their role in the urban spectacle: “A woman idling on the street is to be ‘consumed’ and ‘enjoyed’ along with the rest of the sights that the city affords” (28). Notwithstanding their objectification, Baudelaire’s

“passante” and Zola’s “jolie dame” offer powerful images of lone women strollers that, I would argue, form a basis for a representation of the flâneuse.

The nature of this objectification is worth considering, for it threatens to undermine the flâneuse identity by defining her in terms of male perception. While Baudelaire’s flâneur reduces the woman to a “[f]ugitive beauté,” a symbol of the experience of modernity, the sales clerks who gaze at Zola’s “jolie dame” try to humanize her: “chaque petit fait de sa vie inconnue, événements du dehors, drames de l’intérieur, avait de la sorte un contrecoup, longuement commenté” (428). Like the “passante,” the “jolie dame” remains enigmatic and ultimately unattainable because of the impersonal nature of modernity, yet Zola offers his flâneuse the possibility of a history. Her detachment reinforces her image as a female flâneur mingling in the crowd while retaining an anonymity comparable to that of Baudelaire’s “homme des foules” in “Le Peintre de la vie moderne” (*Oeuvres*, 689). Apart from the important gender distinction, the difference between the two figures owes itself to an opposition between romantic and realist representations. Baudelaire elevates his flâneur to the level of “prince” with a poetic vision of modernity, and therein lies the reason for his outsider status. On the other hand, Zola’s flâneuse is a marginal figure because of the alienating, dehumanizing effects of modern institutions.

Other flâneuses in the novel are not anonymous, but are rather characters made familiar to the reader as Mouret woos them with “une continuelle caresse de flatterie” (338). The experiences of these women offer insight into the nature of Zola’s version of flânerie. Mme Desforges, a widowed *bourgeoise* and mistress of Mouret, enjoys a life of leisure that includes flânerie in Bonheur, as demonstrated by her appeal to a fellow shopper to stay: “...tu pars

déjà?... Fais donc un tour avec nous” (113) (my emphasis). Mme Desforges has the time and the freedom to browse idly. Her gaze of the surrounding spectacle often serves as a conduit for Zola’s rich descriptions, such as when she observes the animated scene of the summer fashions sale. Zola uses water imagery to describe the movement of the crowd: “le ramous de la foule,” “le double courant d’entrée et de sortie,” “cette mer” (262). We might compare the Zolian flâneuse to the Baudelairian flâneur, who, in “Le Peintre de la vie moderne,” watches “couler le fleuve de la vitalité, si majestueux et si brillant” (692). For both authors, water is a key metaphor for the urban multitude.

Yet the view before Mme Desforges’s eyes is at the same time fragmented and multifarious. The female shoppers make up a “foule mêlée” that includes sales clerks, *petites-bourgeoises*, housekeepers, women in mourning clothes, and wet-nurses with babies (262). Hats and hair of various colors fade next to bursts of colorful materials. Large price tickets with huge numbers glare against colorful prints, shiny silks, and dark woolens. Piles of ribbons “écoraient” shoppers’ heads, and mirrors capture parts of faces, shoulders, and arms. Shoppers continue to break apart until they are finally no more than “une poussière humaine” (262). In her examination of Zola’s light imagery, Catherine LeGouis has asserted that Zola’s artful use of metonymy is more than a realist device, and that it parallels the theme of fragmentation recognized (and even used as a stylistic device) by Benjamin: both critics “perceive the disjuncture between modernity’s surface and interior as a form of fragmentation, a tension between what one sees and what one knows to be” (431). In granting this view of the beguiling nature of modernity to Mme Desforges, I would argue that Zola has given her a perspective that transcends objective observation and rivals the poetic vision of Baudelaire’s male flâneur.

Janet Wolff has argued that the shopper does not qualify as a female version of the flâneur because her strolling is not aimless, since “shopping is a pre-defined and purposeful activity” (21). However, Zola’s representation of the *grand magasin*, which includes enough authentic details to be cited in historical accounts by such authors as Miller and Nord, reveals the essential ambiguity of the space. Its reading room, buffet, art exhibitions, and concerts complicate the definition of the department store and further its association with leisure activities rather than errands. As with Mme Guibal, many of the women are “just looking” in a manner that is every bit as purposeless as the flâneur’s strolls through the arcade. Furthermore, the obvious correlation between the *passage* and the *grand magasin* as commercial spaces indicates that flânerie in both places involved focusing the gaze on similar subjects, namely shop displays and shoppers. Consequently, the possibility of the flâneuse cannot be rejected based on the nature of shopping, since it parallels the activity of the flâneur in the arcade.

The “reflectiveness” of the flâneur’s gaze is another element that Wolff finds missing in the shopper-flâneuse (21). Priscilla Ferguson has developed this idea, insisting that the flâneur loses his *artiste* identity in his transformation to flâneuse. The detachment presumably needed to create art is lacking in the female consumer: “[t]he flâneur’s dispassionate gaze dissipates under pressure from the shopper’s passionate engagement in the world of things to be purchased and possessed” (35). Yet I would argue that Ferguson’s insistence that “consumption is the only motivation for anyone’s presence in the department store” is based on the narrow concept of the department store as strictly a place for shopping (36). Mme Guibal is a wanderer and looker, but she is not a purchaser. Mme Desforges does make purchases, yet her gaze is at times

“dispassionate” enough to distinguish the fleeting and fragmentary aspects of modernity in the spectacle of the *grand magasin*.

Women’s authority in the department store remains questionable, however, and this complicates the notion of the liberated flâneuse. On the one hand, the *grand magasin* exists for and because of women, and its very survival depends on them. Before the winter fashions sale, Mouret frets that the slow start to the day portends an unsuccessful sale: “Ça ne marcherait pas, il était perdu, et il n’aurait pu dire pourquoi: il croyait lire sa défaite sur les visages mêmes des dames qui passaient” (102). Throughout the novel, he strives to keep women interested in the store, from creating increasingly spectacular displays to offering bargains and implementing a generous return policy. Competition from smaller shops and other department stores lead Mouret to slash prices, selling some items at and occasionally below cost, thereby benefiting the women at the expense of the store.

While the female shoppers wield a certain degree of agency through their buying power, they are weakened by their desires, cultivated by Mouret, for luxury items. The *grands magasins* “avaient éveillé dans sa chair de nouveaux désirs, ils étaient une tentation immense, où elle succombait fatalement, cédant d’abord à des achats de bonne ménagère, puis gagnée par la coquetterie, puis dévorée” (85). Mouret exploits what Zola sees as women’s defenselessness in the face of consumer temptation. In his book Models of Power: Politics and Economics in Zola's Rougon-Macquart, David Bell has traced the process by which Mouret steers female shoppers away from the “productive” activity of purchasing household necessities, and toward the “nonproductive” practice of shopping for luxury fashion items (121). Consequently, the women lose a degree of economic power, since their spending is frivolous.

The appetite of the female shoppers culminates in a sort of frenzy marked by a loss of self-control. One shopper, Mme Marty, falls victim to “la fièvre de dépense” (258). She is “sans force contre la tentation du bon marché” as she spends compulsively in nearly every department, despite the trouble that she knows her debts will cause at home (270). Another woman, Mme de Boves, tries in vain to hide her shoplifting under an “apparente flânerie” (435). These may seem like extreme cases, but a description of the shoppers in the lace department indicates the general helplessness of women seduced by commodities:

Les clientes, qui s’y étouffaient, avaient des visages pâles aux yeux luisants. On eût dit que toutes les séductions des magasins aboutissaient à cette tentation suprême, que c’était là l’alcôve reculée de la chute, le coin de perdition où les plus fortes succombaient. Les mains s’enfonçaient parmi les pièces débordantes, et elles en gardaient un tremblement d’ivresse. (276)

These images of women overcome with desire seem to support Ferguson’s argument that the female shopper is too entrenched in commodity culture to share the experience of the male flâneur. However, it is worth noting that in “Les Foules,” Baudelaire’s flâneur compares to Zola’s shopper-flâneuse by finding a similar intoxication in the crowd, experiencing “des jouissances fiévreuses” as he participates in visual and sensory (if not material) consumption (Petits, 16).

The ostensible flânerie of the women in Bonheur is also complicated by Mouret’s calculated arrangement of departments and merchandise. Two nights before the summer fashions sale, Mouret determines that the organization of the store is too logical: “Une femme entraînait, allait droit où elle voulait aller, passait du jupon à la robe, de la robe au manteau, puis se retirait, sans même s’être un peu perdue!” (249). Mouret decides to introduce an element of

disorder that will cause women to get lost and, in essence, *flâner*. This imposed *flânerie* forces women to pass through departments that they would not otherwise visit, and, in so doing, face additional temptations. The tactic works, especially on Mme Marty, who blames the layout for her extravagant spending: “il n’y a pas d’ordre, dans ce magasin. On se perd, on fait des bêtises” (272). Women’s movement and gaze are thus pre-determined according to the capitalist strategies of a powerful male. Yet such manipulation might also be said to arise from Haussmann’s transformations of the streets of Paris, with their straight lines and visual symmetry. The key difference is that while Haussmann’s boulevards are direct and efficient routes, Mouret’s paths are circuitous and discommodious. Regardless, the designs of both master planners reinforce their authority and a fundamental ideology of progress, all while facilitating *flânerie* in the interest of capitalism.

Another means by which Mouret encourages *flânerie* is to place obstacles in the paths of shoppers throughout the store. During the summer fashions sale, he clutters the central landing with merchandise because he finds that “on y circulait trop librement, que la foule ne s’y étouffait pas” (272). Mouret fosters congestion at the store entrance by placing baskets filled with sale items on the sidewalk. As a result, like the animated street making its way into the Café Riche in La Curée, life on the boulevard begins to infiltrate Bonheur. In one instance, Mme de Boves, Mme Marty, and their daughters are carried with the crowd into the shop as if by a current: “Comme les fleuves tirent à eux les eaux errantes d’une vallée, il semblait que le flot des clientes, coulant à plein vestibule, buvait les passants de la rue, aspirait la population des quatre coins de Paris” (253). This image recurs with four other women arriving at the white sale: “Toutes quatre demeuraient sur le trottoir, au milieu des bousculades de l’entrée. Peu à

peu, cependant, le flot les prenait; et elles n'eurent qu'à s'abandonner au courant" (410). In fact, Mouret seeks to bring into the store not only the passersby, but also the noise and animation of the street. To this end, he spreads out the most heavily trafficked departments to create widespread commotion across the store. Zola tells us that if Mouret could, "il aurait fait passer la rue au travers de sa maison" (248).

In the opening pages of Au Bonheur des dames, the overflowing of the store onto the street stops the heroine of the novel in her tracks. Denise Baudu is a 20 year-old *Normande* who moves to Paris with her two young brothers after the death of their father. Denise, who worked in a *magasin de nouveautés* in her native Valognes, hopes to be employed in her uncle's drapery shop located across the street from Bonheur, although she will resort to working at Bonheur when her uncle cannot afford to hire her. As Denise and her brothers make their way to the Baudu shop from the train station, they find themselves before the unavoidable department store, which occupies two *maisons* on each street emanating from a corner building. Denise is mesmerized by the immensity of the structure: "cette maison énorme pour elle, lui gonflait le cœur, la retenait, émue, intéressée, oublieuse du reste" (10). The plate-glass windows that extend the length of the store on both streets create an impression of endlessness. The merchandise outside the entrance transfixes Denise: "Il y avait là, au plein air de la rue, sur le trottoir même, un éboulement de marchandises à bon marché, la tentation de la porte, les occasions qui arrêtaient les clientes au passage" (10). Woolens and strips of fur hang from above, and on tables below sit baskets brimming with remnants "vendus pour rien" (11). An image of abundance continues from shop to street: "C'était un déballage géant de foire, le magasin semblait crever et jeter son trop-plein à la rue" (11).

Denise's gaze is next directed to the displays in the shop windows, which present "un arrangement compliqué" of umbrellas hung at angles to suggest "un toit de cabane rustique," an image of domesticity sheltering other images of femininity: colorful and flesh-toned silk stockings showing the curvature of calves and a symmetrical array of gloves with "leur paume étroite de vierge byzantine" (11). The display indicates the ambiguity of woman's consumer identity during the rise of capitalism. Practical items – umbrellas, stockings, gloves – come in expensive materials and a myriad of colors, transforming them into luxury goods imbued with feminine sensuality. Legs that would otherwise be hidden behind skirts appear stretched out in the window for all to see, a sort of burlesque show prefiguring the French cabarets to come in the 1880s. The theatricality of the window display speaks to the overall spectacle offered by the *grand magasin*, a production that begins before the spectator even enters the door. The shop window displays, along with the sale merchandise outside the door, function to lure pedestrians into the store with the promise of visual and sensual pleasure offered under the pretext of domestic need. Friedberg has examined the complex partnership of observation and consumption, explaining:

New desires were created [for woman] by advertising and consumer culture; desires elaborated in a system of selling and consumption which depended on the relation between *looking* and *buying*, and the indirect desire to possess and incorporate through the eye. (37) (Friedberg's emphasis)

Woman's gaze was thus fundamental to the existence of the department store, whose sales resulted from the desires it created in the female looker. Bonheur's window display grips Denise despite her lower-class standing, and this suggests a sort of universal appeal to

womanhood. Indeed, the items on the sidewalk sold “pour rien” indicate that this luxury is attainable to all women, hence the notion of the democratization of luxury that Zola considers fundamental to modern commerce (85).

As Denise rounds the corner, she encounters another arresting window display, this one featuring mannequins dressed in silk, velvet, cashmere, fur and feathers. The articles in the *confections* department of the Valognes dry goods store pale in comparison to those in front of her. Her reaction provides a glimpse of her dual nature: as a retail worker, she admires the quality and artful arrangement of the merchandise; as a woman, she is captivated by the beauty of the clothing. The mannequins have large price tickets in place of heads, and mirrors on either side “les reflétaient et les multipliaient sans fin, peuplaient la rue de ces belles femmes à vendre” (13). Friedberg sees this image as symbolic of the commodification of woman (41). According to Bowlby, the headless mannequins represent the objectification of women who, in aspiring to look like what they see in the window, become “mere bodies, potential bearers of clothes” (73). These readings reflect Zola’s concern with the dehumanizing effects of capitalism. Yet, I would suggest, it is also fundamentally important that the price of the clothing is so clearly visible, a technique that revolutionized retail transactions and promoted *flânerie*. The prominent tickets, more or less at eye level, attract the gaze and indicate the wide range of prices, “depuis les sorties de bal à vingt-neuf francs jusqu’au manteau de velours affiché dix-huit cents francs” (12). Having established the prices, the store invites women to move on to the act of *flânerie*. Furthermore, the visual multiplication of the women adds to the seemingly endless perspective while also obscuring the separation between interior and exterior, street and shop. The women themselves are as ambiguous as their setting. On the one hand,

they are icons of femininity enshrined behind glass in the store windows to be watched and worshipped. On the other hand, they are women on the boulevard, streetwalkers, “femmes à vendre” (13). This suggests the persistence of the reactionary image of women in public as prostitutes, despite the seeming respectability of department store shopping.

As she gazes in the shop window, Denise is among the mannequins projected onto the street, yet she is still “other” next to these ideal women. This becomes clear when, as an obedient sales clerk in Bonheur, she models a coat for Mme Marty and Mme Desforges despite her discomfort at being the object of their attention: “elle dut laisser Marguerite draper le manteau sur elle, comme sur un mannequin... Elle s’abandonnait aux mains de Marguerite, qui la faisait tourner lentement” (122). The two customers are joined by female sales clerks, male employees, a friend of Mouret, and the boss himself in scrutinizing Denise. The young woman suffers this gaze, now cast upon her instead of the coat, as the gawkers ridicule her for her scrawniness and unkempt hair. She is overcome with shame “d’être ainsi changée en une machine qu’on examinait et dont on plaisantait librement... Elle se sentait violente, mise à nu, sans défense” (123). The objectification of Denise in her guise as a human mannequin reveals a darker aspect of the flâneuse’s gaze, when women judge each other according to conventional ideals of beauty.

Denise is an intriguing character, for although she embodies some of the characteristics of the flâneuse, her hard work and sense of purpose suggest an alternate model, one of female perseverance and productivity. Her outsider status, active gaze, incessant walking in the store, and occasional strolls in the Tuileries Garden combine together to support the suggestion of Deborah Parsons that the “shop-girl ... is often a mobile figure, capably traversing the city”

(50). However, as a poor, working class female, Denise has neither the means nor the intrepidity to explore the city. Consequently, she shuts herself in her room at night:

Que pouvait-elle faire sur les trottoirs, sans un sou, avec sa sauvagerie, et toujours inquiétée par la grande ville, où elle ne connaissait que les rues voisines du magasin? Après s'être risquée jusqu'au Palais-Royal, pour prendre l'air, elle rentrait vite, s'enfermait, se mettait à coudre ou à savonner. (135-36)

Denise's "existence de travail" contrasts with the idleness of the women in the store (143).

While the female shoppers "vagabondèrent," Denise walks to the point of exhaustion during her long workdays (274). Her worn-out boots signify that walking for her is work rather than recreation. In fact, she rejects the life of leisure that Mouret offers in exchange for her love: "je m'ennuierais à ne rien faire" (311). Improvements in the working conditions that she implements after gaining influence over Mouret indicate that her industriousness serves a greater social good. In the end, Zola suggests that it is Denise, having conquered the smitten Mouret, who is ultimately "toute-puissante," as the author describes her in the very last words of the novel.

Zola's *flânerie* in Au Bonheur des dames is at the heart of the department store experience. Mouret's *grand magasin* relies on, encourages, and sometimes even requires *flânerie*. The department store occupies an undefined realm, somewhere between public and private spheres, and its *flâneuses* are surrounded by both the city spectacle and the comforts of home. The triumph of Denise demonstrates Zola's faith in the worker, yet her work would not be possible without the *flânerie* of the shoppers. Denise may seem in several respects to be the opposite of the shopping *flâneuses*; however, she is ultimately shown to be on their side. Her

gaze into the shop windows in the opening pages of the novel aligns her with the women seduced by the department store visuals. By the end of the novel, she has become, as Naomi Schor explains, a mediator between Mouret and those in his store through the improvements that she has instigated for workers and shoppers alike. Schor grants Denise's power to the entire crowd in the store: "[for Mouret to] marry Denise, to accept the higher order of values she represents, is to accede at the same time to the crowd's will, to give back what he has taken" (165). Perhaps the flâneuse holds the ultimate power as Mouret depends on and compensates her, although her manipulation by the capitalist forces at play in the department store challenges her authority. Zola's flânerie reveals the fundamental ambiguity of women's position and function not only within the urban phenomenon of the *grand magasin*, but also within modern society at large. The flâneuse who makes the department store her public home in Au Bonheur des dames prefigures the women of future generations who will search for identity beyond the domestic realm.

NOTES

¹ “À une passante” first appeared in the “Tableaux Parisiens” section of the 1861 edition of Les Fleurs du mal:

La rue assourdissante autour de moi hurlait.
Longue, mince, en grand deuil, douleur majestueuse,
Une femme passa, d’une main fastueuse
Soulevant, balançant le feston et l’ourlet;

Agile et noble, avec sa jambe de statue.
Moi, je buvais, crispé comme un extravagant,
Dans son œil, ciel livide où germe l’ouragan,
La douceur qui fascine et le plaisir qui tue.

Un éclair... puis la nuit! — Fugitive beauté
Dont le regard m’a fait soudainement renaître,
Ne te verrai-je plus que dans l’éternité?

Ailleurs, bien loin d’ici! trop tard! jamais peut-être!
Car j’ignore où tu fuis, tu ne sais où je vais,
Ô toi que j’eusse aimée, ô toi qui le savais! (103)

(Baudelaire, Charles. Les Fleurs du mal. Paris: Garnier Frères, 1961.)

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The questions that arise from this examination of *flânerie* in three novels by Zola reveal the ambiguities of the spaces of modernity and the female experience of urbanity within these spaces. From Thérèse to Renée to Denise and the department store shoppers, we see signs of the *flâneuse* in Paris despite moments of immobility and seclusion. The challenges that these women face while negotiating the city contrast with the freedom of mobility and authoritative gaze enjoyed by the male characters in the novels, particularly *Camille*, *Laurent*, *Saccard*, and *Mouret*.

At first, Thérèse Raquin responds to her imposed role of wife and housekeeper by immobilizing herself to the extreme, secluding herself in the arcade shop and repressing her passions under a rigid exterior. These passions erupt into an affair with Laurent, and her infidelity marks a continued rejection of her presumed domestic role. Remarried to Laurent, Thérèse finds only torture and anguish in the union; domestic bliss evades her once again. Her final *flânerie* on the streets of Paris seems, in Laurent's eyes, to be an antidote to her anxiety, yet she manages only to delay the inevitable haunting at home. Thérèse is unable to reconcile her many identities: wife/cousin, daughter-in-law/niece, lover/adulteress, prostitute/*flâneuse*. Her position in the family setting is as ambiguous as her place in the urban environment, where she retreats from the gaze into the safety of the *Passage du Pont-Neuf*, only to find that the domestic sphere is more dangerous than the

streets of Paris. In the character of Thérèse, we catch a glimpse of the *flâneuse*, though she ultimately perishes as Thérèse returns to the death that awaits her in the *passage couvert*, itself a dying symbol of the past.

In La Curée, despite the limitations placed on her mobility, Renée attempts to gain access to forbidden zones, such as the actress's masquerade and the café. Furthermore, through the use of masculine optical tools and garments, she endeavors to experience the gaze of the male *flâneur*. However, her appetite for pleasure fostered by the excesses of the Second Empire is her ultimate undoing. Her panoramic view in the last pages of the novel terminates in her sobbing, her head in her hands, defeated by the urban environment that had formerly aroused her curiosity. In Renée we see a further articulation of the *flâneuse*, yet principally as the impersonator of the male *flâneur*, an identity that Renée ultimately cannot maintain.

Denise embodies the modern woman in Au Bonheur des dames. Her social status is equivocal, obscured by her working class origins, fine silk saleswoman clothing, and eventual marriage to the successful bourgeois entrepreneur, Octave Mouret. She acts as “mother” to her young brothers, but also typifies the urban working woman. Moreover, whereas her “window shopping” at the beginning of the novel suggests that she participates in the *flâneuse*'s observation of the urban spectacle, her absorption into the machine of the *grand magasin* changes her relation to that spectacle. As part of her job, she must walk throughout the store, sometimes at a strolling pace to match the shoppers that she accompanies, yet her *promenades* are work rather than a leisure activity.

Questions surrounding the freedom of mobility and the nature of urban spectatorship are fundamental to these novels by Zola, as well as to the definition of the nineteenth-century flâneur. Baudelaire's flâneur is a figure in a prose poem, without a specific context other than the streets of Paris at the onset of modernity, and as a substitute for the poet himself, he displays a version of flânerie that ultimately privileges individuality and poetic vision. Zola's heroines are embedded in situations that tend to restrict, control, and manipulate their mobility and gaze, yet possibilities for authority and autonomy arise in these spaces that blur the lines between interior and exterior, private and public, nature and artifice, and tradition and progress. Taken individually, the cases of these women could be interpreted as failed efforts at flânerie. I would argue, however, that the Zolian flâneuse evolves throughout these novels by virtue of the increased participation of the female characters in city life. It is relevant that of the three Zola works studied here, the one that contains the most fully realized version of female flânerie is one that the author describes in his notes as containing a message of optimism:

Je veux dans Au Bonheur des dames faire le poème de l'activité moderne. Donc, changement complet de philosophie: plus de pessimisme d'abord, ne pas conclure à la bêtise et à la mélancolie de la vie, conclure au contraire à son continuel labeur, à la puissance et à la gaieté de son enfantement. (Rougon 1679)

The elements that Zola emphasizes – “labeur,” “puissance” and “gaieté” – all signify concerns of the modern woman as she strolls into the twentieth century.

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